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# **PASSION AND SOCIETY**



# PASSION AND SOCIETY

by

DENIS DE ROUGE~~MENT~~

*translated by*

MONTGOMERY BELGION

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## PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Society requires women to have husbands, but in novels it is found necessary that they should have lovers. This contradiction is the source of a persistent moral disquiet which turns marriage into a problem and even leads to talk of a 'breakdown' of marriage. It is that disquiet I have sought to elucidate in the present book. My purpose has not been to moralize, but to *describe*, from a sociological standpoint, our contemporary situation together with its more or less remote causes. The result is a kind of outline-history of the cult of passion. It is divided into seven sections which I call 'books'. The first expounds the concealed content of the legend or myth of Tristan and Iseult. The reader is conducted down the successive circles of passion. The seventh and last book adumbrates a human attitude poles apart, and in doing so completes the description of the cult of passion; for nothing may be really surveyed and taken stock of till we have passed beyond it, or at least have touched its borders even if we cannot cross them. As for the intermediate books, the second is an attempt to reach back to the religious origins of the myth, and the others describe its effects in the most various spheres—in mysticism, literature, the art of war, and the morals of marriage.

I have had no intention of either flattering or disparaging what Stendhal called passion-love; I have simply tried to describe it as a historical fact with in reality a religious origin. But while men and women put up very well with



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talk about love, and indeed never tire of listening to it, they recoil from any *definition* of passion. For this reason the book will establish the extent to which it was needed by the extent to which to begin with it displeases, and it will not serve any useful purpose unless it converts to its view those who will have grown aware in the course of reading it why they first of all found it unpleasant. My treatment of the subject is sure to bring down on my head a rain of reproaches. People in love will take me for a cynic, and people who have never experienced real passion will be surprised to see me devote a whole book to it. The former will declare that to describe love is to lose it; the latter, that it is time lost. I can only expect to please those who are to be satisfied with finding out about a thing.

Lacking an omniscience it would need several lifetimes to acquire, I have been content to seek out here and there appropriate facts for the support of views that are altogether intuitive. For that matter, I met with far more than was necessary, and the following pages contain but a summary of what I gathered. This exposes me to a double risk. I might have won over a number of women readers to my view had I only abstained from producing evidence for it. And I should have won the good opinion of experts had I not made use of the results of their labours in order to draw my own inferences. In the circumstances my only hope is that I shall succeed in instructing my women readers at the same time as I entertain the experts.

So much I said in my original preface. I am glad to have the opportunity in this English edition of adding a few elucidations which may prevent my being misunderstood.

It has been asserted and repeated that the core of my book is the claim that the poetry of the troubadours is connected with the Albigensian heresy. Possibly this *theory* is the feature that will most forcibly strike any one who reads me hastily. But the real meaning of what I have to say lies

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elsewhere. And I must be at pains to insist that even if my historical views appear disputable in the stern eyes of the expert, they remain accurate to the precise extent they are brought in here—as illustrations and not as demonstrations, as analogies having a spiritual significance and not as scientific discoveries.

Again, some readers have supposed—and there I may have been to blame—that I regard passionate love as an invention of the twelfth century. Actually, the matter is more complex. At all times and in all places the *natural* growth of what I call passionate love has been visible. But alike in Greece and Rome and in the East the frenzy of passion was treated as simply a frenzy and nothing more. Not till the twelfth century—the century of Abélard, Saint Bernard, the Troubadours and *Tristan*—and then in Western Europe, did the natural seeds of passion, instead of being destroyed, suddenly begin to be cultivated. The love frenzy was raised to the level of a religious wisdom. It was given a symbolical expression that made it acceptable, a dignified form, and a rhetoric that endowed it with standing. Unfortunatè love was admitted to be beautiful and good *to the extent it was woeful*. ‘De tous les maux le mien diffère; il me plaît’, wrote Chrestien de Troyes. Delight in the tribulations of love is the novelty I set out from—the ‘difference’ I have sought to account for.

Thirdly and lastly, let me say that my real subject is religious, not historical. It is concerned with the opposition between the passion that is expressed in *Tristan* and the Christian notion of *love* (Book I and Books VI and VII). That many persons in France have failed to perceive this may be due to the way the French treat love, either too lightly or too gravely, either making fun of it or else dramatizing it. The French, that is to say, always discuss matters connected with love in ironical terms or else in sentimental terms; they cannot treat it *seriously*. May I believe that English and American readers are strangers to

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this Gallic weakness? At least, myself not without a touch of irony or sentimentality perhaps, I hope they are.

This book is one that haunted me all through my boyhood and youth. Three years ago I began to see the written form that it should take, and alim<sup>en</sup>ted it with a certain amount of reading. When I sat down to v<sup>ri</sup>te it, I finished it in four months. This reminds me of the painter Vernet, who, on being told that his price for a picture was rather high, replied: 'It has taken an hour's work—and my entire life.'

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

THIS book—which is appearing in Spanish as well as in English and has attracted very considerable attention on the Continent—brings M. de Rougemont before English and American readers for the first time. But he is by no means a new author. He has published *Le Paysan du Danube* (1932), *Politique de la personne* (1934), *Penser avec les mains* (1936), *Journal d'un intellectuel en chômage* (1937)—the book that gave him a name in France—*Journal d'Allemagne* (1937); and he is also the author of *Nicolas de Flue* (1939), a play set to music by Honegger. Furthermore, he has translated into French—*Traité du serf arbitre* (1936)—the Latin treatise with which Luther retorted to Erasmus on the subject of free will. He is a contributor to the *Nouvelle revue française*, the *Figaro*, the *Revue de Paris*, and *Esprit*; and he helped to found the French movement associated with this last-named review, a movement that aims to establish the importance of 'the person' as the centre of every human being. For a couple of years he conducted with others a French 'Barthian' periodical called *Hic et Nunc*.

Denis de Rougemont was born in French Switzerland in 1906, and educated at Neuchâtel, Geneva, and Vienna. From 1930 to 1933 he was a publisher in Paris, from 1933 to 1935 one of the unemployed, and from 1935 to 1936 a lecturer at the University of Frankfurt on the Main. He is at present serving as an officer in the mobilized Swiss Army.



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*Book One*

*The Tristan Myth*



## I

### BEHIND THE VOGUE OF THE NOVEL

‘My Lords, if you would hear a high tale of love and death . . .’<sup>1</sup>

We know we could listen to nothing more delightful; and this opening of Bédier’s *Tristan* should serve accordingly as a model of how to begin writing a novel. It must be an unerring art that can at once thrust us into the state of absorbed suspense thanks to which narrative imparts the illusion of reality. Where does the spell come from? And why should our feelings go half-way to meet the emotional effect of such a profound rhetorical device? One thing the tremendous vogue of the romantic novel makes immediately clear: the chord that awakens in us the most sonorous echoes has for its tonic and dominant, so to speak, the words ‘love’ and ‘death’. There are other and more occult grounds for thinking that this is the clue to the European mind.

Love and death, a fatal love—in these phrases is summed up, if not the whole of poetry, at least whatever is popular, whatever is universally moving in European literature, alike as regards the oldest legends and the sweetest songs. Happy love has no history. Romance only comes into existence where love is fatal, frowned upon and doomed by life itself. What stirs lyrical poets to their finest flights is neither the delight of the senses nor the fruitful contentment of the settled couple; not the satisfaction of love, but its *passion*. And passion means suffering. There we have the fundamental fact.

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Bédier, *The Romance of Tristan and Iseult*, translated by Hilaire Belloc (London, 1919).

## THE TRISTAN MYTH

Our eagerness for both novels and films with their identical type of plot; the idealized eroticism that pervades our culture and upbringing and provides the images filling the background of our lives; our desire for 'escape', which a mechanical boredom exacerbates—everything within and about us glorifies passion. Hence the prospect of a passionate experience has come to seem the promise that we are about to live more fully and more intensely. We look upon passion as a transfiguring force, something beyond delight and pain, an ardent beatitude. In 'passion' we are no longer aware of that 'which suffers', only of what is 'thrilling'. And yet actually passionate love is a misfortune. In this respect manners have undergone no change for centuries, and the community still drives passionate love in nine cases out of ten to take the form of adultery. No doubt lovers can invoke numerous exceptions. But statistics are inexorable, and they confute our poetic self-deception.

Can we be in such a state of delusion, can we have been so thoroughly 'mystified', as *really* to have forgotten the unhappy aspect of passion, or is it that in our heart of hearts we prefer to what must seemingly fulfil our ideal of a harmonious existence something that afflicts and yet elevates us? Let me examine the contradiction more closely, notwithstanding that to do so *must* seem disagreeable, since it threatens to uncover what we would rather not see. To assert that passionate love is actually tantamount to adultery is to insist upon a fact which our cult of love both conceals and distorts; it exposes what by the cult is dissimulated, repressed, and left unnamed so as to leave us free to give ourselves up ardently to something we should never dare regard as our due. In the reader's very objection to recognizing that passion and adultery are commonly indistinguishable in contemporary society, we have a first indication of the paradox that we now desire passion and unhappiness only on condition we need never admit wishing for them as such.

## BEHIND THE VOGUE OF THE NOVEL

To go by literature, adultery would seem to be the most notable occupation of both Europe and America. Few are the novels that fail to allude to it; and the vogue of the others, how we make allowances for these, the very passion with which we sometimes denounce them—all that shows well enough what couples dream about now that they are in the grip of a system which turns marriage into a duty and convenience. Without adultery, what would happen to imaginative writing? Novels and plays subsist on the so-called 'breakdown of marriage'. Probably, also, they help to prolong the breakdown, on the one hand by extolling what religion regards as a crime and law as an infringement, and, on the other hand, by making fun of this and drawing from it an inexhaustible fund of situations either comic or shameless. Whether the subject is idealized by speaking of the divine rights of passion, refined away with the help of a psychology of social success, or mocked by the popularity which the eternal triangle enjoys in the theatre, we are constantly *betraying* how widespread and disturbing is our obsession by the love that breaks the law. Is this not the sign that we wish to escape from a horrible reality? To turn the situation into either a farce or something mystical is equally to confess that it is unbearable. Ill-assorted couples, the disappointed, the rebellious, the intense, the shameless, the unfaithful or the deceived (whether in fact or in dreams, in remorse or in terror, in the delight of rebellion or the disquiet of temptation)—these are the categories into one or another of which it is easy to fit all but a few men and women. The word 'adultery' sums up one half of human unhappiness—renunciation, compromises, separations, neurasthenia, together with the irritating and petty confusions of dreams, obligations, and secret consents. Although so many books are being produced, or perhaps on that very account, it sometimes seems as if nothing had yet been said about the reality of our unhappiness, and that some of the most in-

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genuous problems in this department have too often been solved before being propounded.

For instance, once the existence of the ill has been recognized, must the institution of marriage bear the blame for it, or is there something fatal to marriage at the very heart of human longing? Has the so-called 'Christian' notion of marriage, as many people suppose, really brought about all this upset, or is there a notion of love abroad in the world which, although perhaps we do not yet realize it, renders the marriage bond intolerable in its very essence? It is obvious that Western Man likes what destroys 'the happiness of the married couple' *at least as much* as he likes anything that may ensure it. Where does the contradiction come from? If the breakdown of marriage has been simply due to the attractiveness of the forbidden, it still remains to be seen why we hanker after unhappiness, and what notion of love—what secret of our existence, of the human mind, perhaps of our history—this hankering must hint at.

## II

### THE MYTH

There is one great European myth of adultery—the Romance of *Tristan and Iseult*. In the midst of our chaotic conduct, and piercing the jumble of moral systems and immorality which the chaos fosters, there are purely dramatic moments when this mythical shape looms out like a watermark. It is then a bold and simple design, a kind of archetype of our most complex feelings of unrest. And as poets, in order to get away from the current linguistic confusion, are wont to seek the remote origin of a word—the thing or action which this word first denoted—so I wish to connect with this myth part of the disorder in contemporary

## THE MYTH

manners. I am undertaking an *etymology of the passions*, which promises to be less inconclusive than actual etymology, because it is our lives, not some theoretical science, that will supply its instant verification.

It may at once be asked if the Romance of *Tristan* is indeed a myth, and if in that case to try to analyse it is not to destroy its *charm*. But we are no longer at the stage of supposing that the mythical is tantamount to unreality or illusion. Too many myths now display their indisputable power over us. And yet abuse of the term has made a fresh definition needful. Speaking generally, a myth is a story—a symbolical fable as simple as it is striking—which sums up an infinite number of more or less analogous situations. A myth makes it possible to become aware at a glance of certain types of *constant relations* and to disengage these from the welter of everyday appearances.

More narrowly, a myth expresses the *rules of conduct* of a given social or religious group. It issues accordingly from whatever *sacred* principle has presided over the formation of this group. Symbolical accounts of the life and death of gods, legends accounting for either sacrifices or the origin of taboos, are examples of myths. It has frequently been noted that myths never have an author. The origin of a myth has to be *obscure*, and so to some extent has its meaning. A myth stands forth as the entirely anonymous expression of collective—or, more exactly, of common—facts. Therefore, a work of art—whether poem, tale, or novel—differs radically from a myth. The validity of a work of art depends on nothing but the talent of its author. What matters about it is exactly what does not matter as regards a myth—its ‘beauty’ or its ‘verisimilitude’, together with all its qualities of unique success, such as originality, skill, style, &c. *But the most profound characteristic of a myth is the power which it gains over us, usually without our knowing.* If a story, an event, or some leading human figure may turn into a myth, it is precisely by virtue of coming to hold sway



## THE TRISTAN MYTH

over us as though against our will. A work of art, as such, never exerts, properly speaking, any *compulsion* upon its spectators or auditors. However splendid and powerful it may be, it is always open to criticism and can always be enjoyed on personal grounds. With a myth it is otherwise. The statement of a myth disarms all criticism, and reason, if not reduced to silence, at least becomes ineffective.

I propose to consider *Tristan*, not as a piece of literature, but as typical of the relations between man and woman in a particular historical group—the dominant social caste, the knights and their ladies, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The group in question was indeed long ago dissolved. Yet its laws remain our laws in an unsuspected and diluted form. Profaned and denied by our official legal codes, these laws have become all the more compelling in that the only power they wield is over our *dreams*.

The Tristan legend has many features indicative of a myth. First of all there is the fact that the author—supposing the legend to have had one, and one only—is entirely unknown. The five 'original' versions that have come down to us are artistic rearrangements of an archetype it is impossible to trace.<sup>1</sup> Another sign of the mythical in the Tristan legend is its making use of a *sacred* principle.<sup>2</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> Critical comparison makes it easy to eliminate the individual vagaries of the five authors. When I come *infra* (§5) to analyse the content of the legend, I shall neglect such variations because they are very easily accounted for by ephemeral circumstances or else by the personal tastes of each writer.

<sup>2</sup> In order to forestall misconception, I must insist that I am concerned only with the Tristan legend as *written*. That alone is what I refer to wherever I speak of the original myth. There is no doubt much to be made out of the sacred attributes of the characters of Tristan and Iseult (or Essylt) in Celtic mythology. And unquestionably many details of the bardic oral tradition were incorporated with the legend (Cf. Book II, §11, *infra*). But it is equally certain that none of the five authors—neither Bérout, Thomas, Eilhart, nor the author of the *Roman en prose*, nor the author of *La Folie Tristan*—had been initiated to this tradition.

## THE MYTH

advance of the action, and the effects which this action was intended to have on an auditor, depend (to an extent I hope to make clear) on a set of rules and ceremonies which are no other than those of medieval chivalry. And the 'orders' of knighthood were often called 'religions'. 'A religion' is what Chastellain, the fifteenth-century Burgundian chronicler, calls the Order of the Golden Fleece—the latest of such orders in point of time—and he refers to it as a sacred mystery, notwithstanding that he was writing at a period when chivalry can hardly have been more than a survival.<sup>1</sup> Finally, the very *obscurity* which we find in the legend denotes its deep relation to a myth.

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Not one of them is aware of the sacred and symbolical significance inhering originally in the characters whose loves he relates. Moreover, the myth of passionate love is all contained in the legend as this was set down by twelfth-century poets after they had endowed it with a new significance, and *that alone is what is still active within us to-day*.

<sup>1</sup> J. Huizinga, in *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, translated by F. Hopman (London, 1924), says (p. 56):

'Medieval thought in general was saturated in every part with the conceptions of the Christian faith. In a similar way and in a more limited sphere, the thought of all those who lived in the circles of court or castle was impregnated with the idea of chivalry. . . . This conception even tends to invade the transcendental domain. The primordial feat of arms of the archangel Michael is glorified by Jean Molinet as "the first deed of knighthood and chivalrous prowess that was ever achieved". From the archangel "terrestrial knighthood and human chivalry" take their origin, and in so far are but an imitation of the host of the angels around God's throne.'

Again (p. 57):

'The conception of chivalry constituted for these authors [Froissart, Monstrelet, d'Escouchy, Chastellain, La Marche, &c.] a sort of magic key, by the aid of which they explained to themselves the motives of politics and history. . . . What they saw about them looked primarily mere violence and confusion. War . . . tended to be a chronic process of isolated raids and incursions; diplomacy was mostly a very solemn and very verbose procedure, in which a multitude of questions about juridical de-

## THE TRISTAN MYTH

As a rule, the obscurity of a myth does not reside in its form of expression.<sup>1</sup> The obscurity belongs in part to the mystery of the myth's origin, and in part to the vital import of what the myth symbolizes. If this were not obscure, or *if there were no reason to conceal its origin and its bearing so that it might escape challenge*, a myth would lack a *raison d'être*. A law, a moral treatise, or even some little tale able to serve as a mnemonic summary, would do instead. No myth arises so long as it is possible to keep to the obvious and to express this obvious openly and directly. On the contrary, a myth arises whenever it becomes dangerous or impossible to speak frankly and plainly about certain social or religious matters, or affective relations, and yet there is a desire to preserve the doctrine on these matters or relations, or the relations cannot be destroyed. There is, for example, no need of myths nowadays in order to set forth scientific truths, which we deal with from an entirely 'lay' standpoint and which therefore have everything to gain from individual criticism. *But a myth is needed to express the dark and unmentionable fact that passion is linked with death*, and involves the destruction of any one wholly yielding himself up to it. For we have wanted to preserve passion and to cherish the unhappiness that it brings with it; and yet at the same time both passion and unhappiness have stood condemned in the sight of official morals and in the

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tails clashed with some very general traditions and some points of honour. All notions which might have enabled them to discern in history a social development were lacking to them. Yet they required a form for their political conceptions, and here the idea of chivalry came in. By this traditional fiction they succeeded in explaining to themselves, as well as they could, the motives and the course of history, which thus was reduced to a spectacle of the honour of princes and the virtue of knights, to a noble game with edifying and heroic rules.'

<sup>1</sup> In this case, the form of expression is the language of the poems, and, as everybody knows, this language is extremely simple.

## THE MYTH

sight of reason. Hence, thanks to the obscurity, we have been able to receive and enjoy imaginatively the disguised content of the myth, and yet have not grown sufficiently aware of the nature of this content to feel the contradiction. In this way certain human facts which we realize, or suspect, to be fundamental have escaped challenge. A myth can *express* such realities to the extent that human beings instinctively demand, but it will also *veil* such realities to the extent they are in peril from reason<sup>1</sup> and the light of day.

The origins of the mythical romance of *Tristan* are unknown or but half-known, its nature was once *sacred*, and it veils what it is disclosing, so that it may be wondered if it fully exerts the *compelling* power of a true myth. This is a question that cannot be shirked. It carries us to the heart of the problem, and at once shows this problem to be topical. In the thirteenth century the rules of chivalry did indeed operate with absolute compulsion, but in the romance they figure only as *mythical obstructions* and as *ritual rhetorical images*. They provide the tale with pretexts for rebounding, and, above all, the tale would not without them have obtained unquestioning acceptance from its audiences. It has got to be recognized that these social 'ceremonies' are ways of obtaining toleration for an anti-social *content*, which in the present case is passion. In this context, indeed, the word 'content' acquires its full force. The rules of chivalry literally 'contained' the passion of Tristan and Iseult; and only thanks to being thus 'contained' was the passion expressible in the semi-overt form of a myth. Because, in being the passion that wishes for Night and triumphs in a transfiguring Death, it must

<sup>1</sup> The kind of reason I have in mind here is an activity I wish to call 'profaning', inasmuch as it operates at the cost of the collectively sacred and emancipates the individual from the compulsions which this exerts. Although in honour among the French, the habit of subjecting all matters to the analysis of reason is *sacrilegious*, anti-social, and 'disruptive'.

## THE TRISTAN MYTH

represent, for any society whatsoever, a threat overwhelmingly intolerable. The social groups then in existence had therefore to be capable of withstanding it by means of a strongly framed structure, so that in obtaining an outlet it nevertheless did not do too much damage.

Wherever the social bonds slacken or the social group disintegrates, a myth must cease to be such in the strict sense. But what it then loses in power of compulsion and ability to be communicated in a veiled and tolerable guise, it gains in occult influence and in lawless violence. *Pari passu* with the loss of the last virtues of chivalry, even in the profaned guise of *good form*—the conventions to be observed by gentlemen—the passion ‘contained’ in the original myth spread out into everyday life, invaded the subconscious, and invoked, or, if necessary, invented, new compulsions. For, as will be shown presently, it was not only the nature of society, but also the very ardour of the dark passion, that made it necessary for the avowal to be *masked*.

The myth, in the strict sense, was formed in the twelfth century, just at a time when the leading caste was making a great effort to establish social and moral order. The intention was, indeed, ‘to contain’ the surges of the destructive instinct; for religion, in attacking this instinct, had been exacerbating it. Contemporary chronicles, sermons, and satires show that in this century there occurred an early ‘breakdown of marriage’; and the breakdown made a vigorous reaction imperative. The achievement of the Romance of *Tristan* was so effectively to set passion within a framework that passion thereupon asked for no more than symbolical satisfactions.<sup>1</sup> Let such a framework be removed, and passion will nevertheless subsist. It will still be just as dangerous to the life of society, and will still

<sup>1</sup> Rather with the same aim and to the same effect, the Church took paganism into its ritual.

## TOPICALITY OF THE MYTH

drive society to attempt a corresponding restoration of orderly modes. Hence, not the myth in its original guise, but *that need of a myth* to which the Romance answered, remains historically permanent.

Enlarging my definition, I shall henceforth intend by 'a myth' this permanence of a type of relations together with the corresponding reactions. The myth of Tristan and Iseult I shall consider to be, not merely the Romance, but the peculiarity which the Romance illustrates—something the influence of which has gone on extending all the way down to the present day. The myth that has been agitating us for eight hundred years as spell, terror, or ideal, is at one and the same time a passion sprung from dark nature, an energy excited by the mind, and a pre-established potentiality in search of the coercion that shall intensify it. In having shed its original guise, it has merely become more dangerous. Fallen myths can distil venom even like the dead truths alluded to by Nietzsche.

## III

### TOPICALITY OF THE MYTH, OR REASONS FOR ITS ANALYSIS

There is no need to have read Bérroul's *Tristan* or even M. Bédier's, and no need to have heard Wagner's opera, in order to undergo in the course of everyday life the nostalgic power of this myth. The power is manifested in the majority of novels and films, in the popularity these enjoy with the masses, the welcome they obtain in the hearts of middle-class folk, from poets, from ill-assorted couples and from the shopgirls and seamstresses who dream of having a miraculous love-affair. The myth operates wherever passion is dreamed of as an ideal in-

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stead of being feared like a dangerous fever; wherever its irresistible character is welcomed, invoked, or imagined as a magnificent and desirable disaster instead of as simply a disaster. It lives upon the lives of people who think that love is their fate (and as unavoidable as the effect of the love-potion is in the Romance); that it swoops upon powerless and ravished men and women in order to consume them in a pure flame; or that it is stronger and more real than happiness, society, or morality. It lives upon the very life of the romanticism within us; it is the great mystery of that religion of which the poets of the nineteenth century were the priests and prophets.

Of this influence and that it is the influence of a myth there is immediate evidence, evidence provided in this very place by the reader's disinclination to face squarely what it is I am proposing to do. The Tristan Romance is 'sacred' for us precisely to the extent that it seems 'sacrilegious' on my part to be attempting to analyse it. No doubt the charge of sacrilege now has a very mild quality. In primitive societies it resulted, not in the repulsion which I anticipate, but in the execution of the guilty person. The sacred which is involved here amounts to no more than an obscure and weak survival. The only risk I run is that the reader may close the book at this point, and not open it again. True, the unconscious intent of such an act does not fall short of getting me put to death, but the intent is without effect. However, supposing you spare me, dear Reader, it will not follow that you fail to consider passion as something sacred. Possibly people are nowadays as feeble in passion as in acts of reproof. In the absence of open foes, perhaps it is against themselves that writers must show the daring which is being demanded of them, and perhaps it is only the enemy in our own breasts that we can really contend with.

I confess I was vexed to find one commentator describing the Tristan legend as 'an epic of adultery'. The phrase

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may be accurate enough in respect of the dry bones of the Romance. That does not make it any the less vexatious and 'prosaically' narrow. I doubt if it can be maintained that the real subject of the legend is the moral fault. How assert that Wagner's *Tristan*, for example, is no more than an opera about adultery? For that matter, is adultery but a nasty word, or the breaking of a contract? Adultery is that too, and in all too many cases no more than that. But it often is a great deal more—a passionate and tragic atmosphere beyond good and evil, and a drama either lofty or dreadful; in short, a drama—a *romance*. And 'romanticism' derives from 'romance'.

Not to digress, I have embarked upon the writing of this book because social confusion has now reached a point at which the pursuit of immorality turns out to be more exhausting than compliance with the old moral codes. The cult of passionate love has been so far *democratized* as to have lost its aesthetic virtues together with its spiritual and tragic values; and we are left with a dull and diluted pain, something unclean and gloomy. In profaning the falsely sacred causes of this, I cannot believe that we have anything to lose. The literature dealing with passion, the advertising which passion gets, the businesslike 'vogue' of what used to be a religious secret—all this needs to be attacked and made war upon, if only to rescue the myth from abuse in its excessive popularization. And whatever sacrilege we may thereby commit will not matter; for poetry has other outlets.

I fasten upon the Tristan myth because it enables me to offer a *simple explanation* of our present confusion and at the same time to set forth certain *permanent relations* which the scrupulous vulgarities of current psychologies submerge. Furthermore, I can lay bare a particular *dilemma*, the stern reality of which we are in process of overlooking as a result of our frenzied living, the state of our culture, and the purr of current moral doctrines.



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To raise up the passion myth in its primitive and sacred vigour and monumental integrity, as a salutary comment on our tortuous connivences and our inability to choose boldly between the Norm of Day and the Passion of Night—such is my first purpose. And I mean by the passion myth that image of the Dying Lovers erected by the disturbing and vampire-like crescendo of Wagner's second act. This book will achieve its aim if it brings the reader to the point of declaring frankly, either that 'This is what I have wanted!' or else 'May I be preserved from that!'

I am not certain that complete self-awareness is a good thing either in a general way or *per se*. I do not hold that practical truths should be trumpeted in the market place. But whatever the 'usefulness' of my undertaking, we in Western Europe and America are destined to become more and more aware of the illusions on which we subsist. And possibly it is going to be the job of philosophers, moralists, and creators of ideal forms, simply to add to the stock of our self-awareness—a kind of consciousness which is of course very largely a bad conscience.

With that I pass to the promised analysis. Remaining deaf and blind to the 'charms' of the tale, I am going to try to summarize 'objectively' the events it relates and the reasons which it either gives for these events or very oddly omits.

## IV

### WHAT THE TRISTAN ROMANCE<sup>1</sup> SEEMS TO BE ABOUT

*Amors par force vos demeine!*—BÉROUL.

Tristan is born in misfortune. His father has just died, and Blanche fleur, his mother, does not survive his birth. Hence his name, the sombre hue of his life, and the lowering stormy sky that hangs over the legend. King Mark of Cornwall, Blanche fleur's brother, takes the orphan into his castle at Tintāgel and brings him up there.

Tristan presently performs an early feat of prowess. He vanquishes the Morholt. This Irish giant has come like a Minotaur to exact his tribute of Cornish maidens or youths. Tristan is of an age for knighthood—that is, he has just reached puberty—and he obtains leave to fight him. The Morholt is killed, but not before he has wounded Tristan with a poisoned barb. Having no hope of recovery, Tristan begs to be put on board a boat that is cast adrift with neither sail nor oar. He takes his sword and harp with him.

He lands in Ireland. There is only one remedy that can save him, and, as it happens, the Queen of Ireland is alone in knowing its secret. But the giant Morholt was this queen's brother, and so Tristan is careful not to disclose his name or to explain how he has come by his wound. Iseult, the queen's daughter, nurses him and restores him to health. Such is the Prologue.

<sup>1</sup> In summing up the chief episodes of the Romance, I shall make use (except here and there) of M. Bédier's *Concordance* (contained in his study of Thomas's poem) for the five twelfth-century versions—those by Béroul, Thomas and Eilhart together with *La Folie Tristan* and *Le Roman en prose*. The later versions by Gottfried of Strasbourg, or by German, Italian, Danish, Russian, Czech, and other imitators, are all derived from those five.

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A few years later a bird has brought to King Mark a golden hair. The king determines to marry the woman from whose head the hair has come. It is Tristan whom he selects to go in quest of her. A storm causes the hero to be cast ashore once again in Ireland. There he fights and kills a dragon that was threatening the capital. (This is the conventional motif of a virgin delivered by a young paladin.) Having been wounded by the dragon, Tristan is again nursed by Iseult. One day she learns that the wounded stranger is no other than the man who killed her uncle. She seizes Tristan's sword and threatens to transfix him in his bath. It is then that he tells her of the mission on which he has been sent by King Mark. And Iseult spares him, for she would like to be a queen. (According to some of the authors, she spares him also because she finds him handsome.)

Tristan and the princess set sail for Cornwall. At sea the wind drops and the heat grows oppressive. They are thirsty. Brengain, Iseult's maid, gives them a drink. But by mistake what she pours out is the 'wine of herbs' which the queen, Iseult's mother, has brewed for King Mark and his bride after they shall have wed. Tristan and Iseult drink it. The effect is to commit them to a fate which they can never enjoy during the remainder of their lives, *for they have drunk their destruction and death*. They confess that they are now in love, and fall into one another's arms.

(Let it be noted here that according to the archetypal version, which Béroul alone has followed, the effect of the love-potion is limited to three years.<sup>1</sup> Thomas, a sensitive psychologist and highly suspicious of marvels, which he

<sup>1</sup> Verses 2137-2140:

A combien fu determinez  
Li lovendrins, li vin herbez:  
La mere Yseut, qui le bolli,  
A trois anz d'amistié le fist.

## THE OSTENSIBLE STORY

considers crude, minimizes the importance of the love-potion as far as possible, and depicts the love of Tristan and Iseult as having occurred spontaneously. Its first signs he places as early as the episode of the bath. On the other hand, Eilhart, Gottfried, and most of the others attribute unlimited effect to the magic wine. Nothing could be more significant than these variations, as we shall see.)

Thus the fault is perpetrated. *Yet Tristan is still in duty bound to fulfil the mission with which King Mark has entrusted him.* So, notwithstanding his betrayal of the king, he delivers Iseult to him. On the wedding night Brengain, thanks to a ruse, takes Iseult's place in the royal bed, thus saving her mistress from dishonour and at the same time expiating the irretrievable mistake she made in pouring out the love-potion.

Presently, however, four 'felon' barons of the king's go and tell their sovereign that Tristan and Iseult are lovers. Tristan is banished to Tintagel town. But thanks to another trick—the episode of the pine-tree in the orchard—Mark is convinced of his innocence and allows him to return to the castle. Then Frocin the Dwarf, who is in league with the barons, lays a trap in order to establish the lovers' guilt. In the spear length between Tristan's bed and the queen's he scatters flour, and persuades Mark to order Tristan to ride to King Arthur at Carduel the next morning at dawn. Tristan is determined to embrace his mistress once more before he rides away. To avoid leaving his foot-marks in the flour he leaps across from his own bed to the queen's. But the effort reopens a wound in his leg inflicted the previous day by a boar. Led by Frocin, the king and the barons burst into the bedchamber. They find the flour bloodstained. Mark is satisfied with this evidence of adultery. Iseult is handed over to a party of a hundred lepers, and Tristan is sentenced to the stake. On the way to execution, however, he is allowed to go into a chantry on the cliff's edge. He forces a window and leaps over the cliff,

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thus effecting his escape. He rescues Iseult from the lepers, and together they go and hide in the depths of the Forest of Morrois. There for three years they lead a life 'harsh and hard'. It happens one day that Mark comes upon them while they are asleep. But on this occasion Tristan has put between Iseult and himself his drawn sword. Moved by this evidence of innocence, as he supposes it to be, the king spares them. Without waking them, he takes up Tristan's sword and sets his own in its place.

*At the end of the three years the potency of the love-potion wears off* (according to Bérout and the common ancestor of the five versions). It is only then that Tristan repents, and that Iseult wishes she were a queen again. Together they seek out the hermit Ogrin, through whom Tristan offers peace to the king, saying he will surrender Iseult. Mark promises forgiveness. As the royal procession approaches, the lovers part. But before this happens Iseult has beseeched Tristan to stay in the neighbourhood till he has made certain that Mark is treating her well. Then, with a final display of feminine wiles, she follows up her advantage in having persuaded Tristan to agree to this, and declares she will join him at the first sign he makes, for nothing shall stop her from doing his will, 'neither tower, nor wall, nor stronghold'.

They have several secret meetings in the hut of Orri the Woodman. But the felon barons are keeping watch and ward over the queen's virtue. She asks and is granted 'a Judgement of God'. Thanks to a subterfuge, the ordeal is a success. Before she grasps the red iron which will not harm one who has spoken the truth, she swears that no man has ever held her in his arms except the king and a poor pilgrim who has just carried her ashore from a boat. And the poor pilgrim is Tristan in disguise.

However, further adventures carry Tristan far away from Iseult, and he then comes to suppose that she no longer loves him. So he agrees to marry 'for her beauty

## SOME RIDDLES

and her name '¹ another Iseult, Iseult 'of the White Hand'. And indeed this Iseult remains unstained, for after their marriage Tristan still sighs for 'Iseult the Fair'.

At last, wounded by a poisoned spear and about to die, Tristan sends for the queen from Cornwall, she who alone can save his life. She comes, and as her ship draws near it hoists a white sail as a sign of hope. But Iseult of the White Hand has been on the look out, and, tormented by jealousy, she runs to Tristan and tells him that the sail is black. Tristan dies. As he does so, Iseult the Fair lands, and on arriving at the castle, she lies down beside her dead lover, clasps him close, and covers his mouth with kisses. Then she dies too.

## V

## SOME RIDDLES

Thus summarized, and with all the 'charm' destroyed, the most absorbing of all poems appears, on cool consideration, to be straightforward neither in its matter nor in its progression. I have passed over numerous accessory episodes, but over none of the motives alleged for the central action. Indeed, these motives I have rather stressed. They have been seen not to amount to much. Tristan delivers up Iseult to the king, *because* bound by the fealty of a knight. At the end of the three years spent in the forest, the lovers part, *because* the love-potion has lost its potency. Tristan marries Iseult of the White Hand 'for her beauty and her name'. If these 'reasons' are discounted—although we shall return to them—the Romance turns out to depend on a series of puzzling contradictions.

¹ 'Pur belté e pur nun d'Isolt' (Thomas).

## THE TRISTAN MYTH

I have been struck by the passing comment of one recent editor of the *légend*. Right through the Romance Tristan is made to appear the physical superior of all his foes and particularly of the king. It follows that no external power prevents him from carrying off Iseult and thus fulfilling his fate. The manners of the time sanctioned the rights of the stronger; they made these rights divine without qualification; and this was especially the case with a man's rights over a woman. It was usually for a woman that men entered the lists. *Why does Tristan not take advantage of these rights?*

There are other riddles equally strange and puzzling. *Why has the sword of chastity been placed between the two sleepers in the forest?* The lovers have already sinned, and they refuse to repent just then. Furthermore, they do not expect that the king will discover them. Yet in all five versions there is neither a line nor a word to explain the sword.<sup>1</sup> Again, *why does Tristan restore the queen to Mark*, even in those versions where at that time the love-potion is still active? If, as some say, the lovers part because they now sincerely repent, why do they promise one another to meet again in the very moment they agree to part? And why later does Tristan go forth upon fresh adventures when he and Iseult have made a tryst in the forest? Why does the guilty queen ask for 'a Judgement of God'? She must know that the ordeal is bound to go against her. It is only successful thanks to a trick improvised at the last moment; and this trick, it is implied, deceives God Him-

<sup>1</sup> It is true that in Bédier's edition of Thomas's poem (Vol. I, p. 240), the king's huntsman is said to have gone to the lovers' retreat, where he has seen 'Tristan lying asleep, and across the cave was Iseult. The lovers were resting from the great heat, and lay apart from one another because . . .' At this point the text breaks off! And Bédier notes: 'An unintelligible passage.' What diabolical agency can have partly destroyed *the one text* likely to have solved the riddle?

## SOME RIDDLES

self, since the miracle ensues.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the judgement having gone in the queen's favour, her innocence is thereupon taken for granted. But if she is innocent, so is Tristan; and it becomes quite impossible to see what prevents his return to the king's castle, and hence to Iseult's side.

At the same time it is surely very odd that thirteenth-century poets—so punctilious in matters of honour and suzerain fealty—should let so much thoroughly indefensible behaviour pass without any comment whatever. How can they hold up Tristan as a model of chivalry when he betrays his king with the most shameless cunning, or the queen as a virtuous lady when she is not only an adulteress, but does not shrink from committing an astute blasphemy? On the other hand, why do they call 'felons' the four barons who defend Mark's honour and who, even if actuated by jealousy, neither deceive nor betray (which is more than can be said of Tristan)?

Even the validity of what few motives are mentioned remains open to question. For if the rule of suzerain fealty required that Tristan should deliver to Mark the betrothed he had been to fetch,<sup>2</sup> his compliance with this rule must seem both very belated and hardly sincere, inasmuch as once he has delivered up Iseult he knows no rest till he has contrived to get back into the castle and is with her again. And as the love-potion was brewed for Mark and his queen, it must be wondered why its potency is not permanent. Three years of married bliss are not much. And when

<sup>1</sup> Gottfried of Strasbourg brazenly insists:

'Twas thus made manifest  
And averr'd before all  
That Christ most glorious  
Will mould like cloth for garments.  
. . . He complies with ev'ry one's wish,  
Whether honest or deceitful.  
He ever is as we would have Him be.

<sup>2</sup> But to whom he had won a full title *himself* by delivering her from the dragon, as Thomas does not omit to stress.



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Tristan marries another Iseult 'for her beauty and her name', but does not touch her, it is surely obvious that nothing has compelled him either to marry or to be guilty of his insulting chastity, and that by marrying a woman whom he cannot make his wife he has put himself into a position from which the only way out is death.

## VI

### CHIVALRY *v.* MARRIAGE

THE Romance of *Tristan and Iseult* brings home to us the antagonism which grew up in the second half of the twelfth century between the rule of chivalry and feudal custom. Perhaps the extent to which the Arthurian romances reflect and foster this antagonism has not hitherto attracted the notice it deserves. In all likelihood courtly chivalry was never more than an ideal. The earliest writers to mention it commonly lament its decay, but in doing so they overlook that in the form in which they depict it it must only then have come into existence in their dreams. It is of the essence of an ideal that its decay should be lamented in the very moment it is clumsily striving for fulfilment. Moreover, to contrast the *fiction* of some ideal of living with tyrannical reality is precisely 'something possible' in a romance. A preliminary answer to several of the riddles propounded by the legend can be sought in this direction. Once it is granted that Tristan's experience was intended to illustrate a conflict between chivalry and feudal society—and hence a conflict between two kinds of *duty* and even between two 'religions'<sup>1</sup>—a number of episodes become intelligible. At any rate, even if the theory of an ideal does

<sup>1</sup> As was hinted at on p. 25, *supra*.

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not dispose of every difficulty, it significantly delays a full explanation.

Arthurian romance, which supplanted the *chanson de geste* with astonishing swiftness in the middle of the twelfth century, differs from this *chanson* in that it allots to a woman the part formerly taken by a suzerain. An Arthurian knight, exactly like a troubadour of the South, regarded himself as the vassal of some chosen Lady, when, actually, he remained the vassal of a lord; and this gave rise to a number of legalistic collisions of which the Romance supplies examples.

Let me go back to the 'felon' barons. According to feudal morals, it was the duty of a vassal to warn his lord of anything that might endanger the latter's rights or honour. Now, in *Tristan* the barons go and tell King Mark how Iseult is behaving. They should therefore be considered feal and true. If, then, the author refers to them as 'felons', he must evidently do so in virtue of some other code, which can only be the code of southern chivalry. For instance, according to a well-known judgement delivered by the Gascon courts of love, whosoever discloses the secrets of courtly love is a felon. The single instance is enough to show that the authors of the different versions of the Romance were deliberately siding with 'courtly' chivalry against feudal law. But there are further grounds for thinking so. Alone the view of fidelity and of marriage that was adopted in courtly love will explain some of the striking contradictions in the tale.

According to the theory officially received, courtly love arose as a reaction to the brutal lawlessness of feudal manners. It is well known that the nobles in the twelfth century made of marriage simply a means of enriching themselves, either through the annexation of dower estates or through expectations of inheritance. When a 'deal' turned out badly, the wife was repudiated. The plea of incest was exploited in curious ways, and in the face of it the

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Church was powerless. To allege a consanguinity of even the fourth degree, no matter on what slender evidence, was enough to secure an annulment. In order to counteract these abuses, which led to much warring and quarrelling, courtly love established a *fealty* that was independent of legal marriage and of which the sole basis was love. It was even contended—for example, in the famous judgement delivered by a court of love in the house of the Countess of Champagne<sup>1</sup>—that love and marriage were incompatible. If such is the view of both Tristan and the author of the Romance, the sense given to the terms ‘felony’ and ‘adultery’ becomes justified—indeed, more than justified, extolled, inasmuch as it implies an intrepid loyalty to the higher law of the *donnoi* or courtly love. (*Donnoi*, or *domnei*, is the Provençal name for the vassal-relation set up between a knight-lover and his lady, or *domina*.)

As has been said, this loyalty was incompatible with the fidelity of marriage. The Romance misses no opportunity of disparaging the social institution of marriage and of humiliating husbands—e.g. the king with horse’s ears who is always being so easily deceived—as well as of glorifying the virtue of men and women who love outside and in despite of marriage. This courtly loyalty, however, displays one curious feature. It is opposed to the ‘satisfaction’ of love as much as to marriage. ‘Of *donnoi* he knows truly

<sup>1</sup> The judgement reads as follows: ‘We declare and affirm, by the tenour of these presents, that love cannot extend its rights over two married persons. For indeed lovers grant one another all things, mutually and freely, without being impelled by any motive of necessity, whereas husband and wife are held by their duty to submit their wills to each other and to refuse each other nothing.’

‘May this judgement, which we have delivered with extreme caution, and after consulting with a great number of other ladies, be for you a constant and unassailable truth. Delivered in this year 1174, on the third day before the Kalends of May, Proclamation VII.’

## CHIVALRY v. MARRIAGE

nothing who wants fully to possess his lady. *Whatever turns into a reality is no longer love.*<sup>1</sup> Here is something that puts us on the track of a preliminary explanation of such episodes as that of the sword of chastity, of Iseult's return to her lord after staying in the Forest of Morrois, and even of Tristan's marriage.

The 'claims of passion', as understood to-day, would entitle Tristan to carry off Iseult as soon as he and she had drunk the love-potion. Instead he delivers her to Mark, and he does so because the rule of courtly love did not allow a passion of this kind 'to turn into a reality', to result in the 'full possession of his lady'. Accordingly, Tristan chooses to respect feudal fealty, which is thus made to disguise and equivocally to abet courtly fealty. He chooses quite freely; for, as was noted above, being stronger than either the king or the barons, he could—*on the feudal plane upon which he puts himself*—resort to the right of force.

A love which, the better to preserve itself, thus conforms to laws whereby it stands condemned must seem strange indeed; and it must be wondered whence arises this preference for whatever *thwarts* passion, hinders the lovers' 'happiness', and parts and torments them. To reply that so courtly love required is only to reply superficially; for this still leaves it to be ascertained why love of this kind is preferred to the other, the love that gets 'fulfilled' and 'satisfied'. With the help of the highly plausible theory that the Romance illustrates a conflict between 'religions', we have been enabled to specify and set forth the main difficulties raised by the plot; but really we have only succeeded in postponing a solution of the problem.

<sup>1</sup> Claude Fauriel, *Histoire de la poésie provençale* (Paris, 1846), I, p. 512.

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## VII

### LOVE IN THE ROMANCE

In my summary of the legend one thing in particular must have struck us. The two codes that come into play—chivalry and feudal morals—are respected by the author *only in those situations where his respecting them makes it possible for the tale to rebound*.<sup>1</sup> In itself this explains nothing. It is all too easy to dispose of every one of our questions by saying: Events happen thus because *otherwise* there would be no story. Such a reply can only seem satisfactory owing to the laziness of literary criticism. Actually, it answers nothing. It simply raises the fundamental question: Why has there had to be a story? And *this* story in particular? There is an unconscious wisdom in calling such a question ingenuous, for it is not asked without peril. In fact, it carries us into the heart of the problem; and undoubtedly it involves far more than the particular case of the Tristan myth.

If by an effort of abstraction we place ourselves outside the process common to both novelist and reader so that we can overhear the intimate dialogue that goes on between them, we see that a tacit convention, or, rather, a mutual *encouragement*, unites them. They both wish the novel to go on, or, as the saying is, to rebound. Suppress that *wish*, and there can be no verisimilitude whatsoever. This is

<sup>1</sup> I should make this quite clear. 1. The codes are respected each in turn as the result of a secret calculation; for if either was chosen to the entire exclusion of the other, the situation would be resolved too soon. 2. The codes are not always respected: for instance, when the lovers sin together as soon as they have drunk the love-potion they are committing a sin according to courtly love just as much as according to Christian and feudal morality. But were it not for that first fault there would be no romance at all.

## LOVE IN THE ROMANCE

exemplified in scientific History. The reader of a 'serious' book is all the more exacting for being aware that neither his wishes nor the author's fancies can govern the sequence of events. Suppose, instead, these wishes to operate unchecked, and nothing thereupon is too far-fetched. This is the position for fiction. Between the two extremes there are as many levels of verisimilitude as there are plots. Or, if you like, what shall be verisimilitude in any given piece of literary fiction depends on the nature of the passions which this piece of fiction is intended to please. In short, a reader pays no heed to distortions or to twistings of the 'logic' of current observation so long as the licence thus taken produces the *pretexts* necessary to the passion which he longs to feel. Hence it is in the kind of 'tricks of the trade' employed by the author that the real plot of a given piece of fiction is disclosed, and a reader condones these tricks precisely to the extent that he shares the author's intentions.

I have shown that the external barriers to the fulfilment of Tristan's love are in one sense arbitrary, and, after all, only fictional contrivances. And it follows from what has just been said about verisimilitude that it is precisely the arbitrary character of the obstructions introduced into a tale that may show what this tale is really about and what is the real nature of the passion it is concerned with. In this respect everything, it must be realized, is symbolical. Everything holds together and is connected after the manner of a *dream*, and not in accordance with real life. This is equally true of the *pretexts* devised by the author, the conduct of his two leading characters, and the secret inclinations which he assumes to exist in his reader. The events narrated are but images or projections of a longing and of whatever runs counter to this longing, excites it, or merely protracts it. Everything the knight and princess do betrays that they act in virtue of a necessity they are unaware of—and that perhaps the author has been unaware

## THE TRISTAN MYTH

of too—but *that is stronger than the need of their happiness*. Objectively, not one of the barriers to the fulfilment of their love is insuperable, and yet each time they give up. It is not too much to say that they never miss a chance of getting parted. When there is no obstruction, they invent one, as in the case of the drawn sword and of Tristan's marriage. They invent obstructions as if on purpose, notwithstanding that such barriers are their bane. Can it be in order to please author and reader? It is all one; for the demon of courtly love which prompts the lovers in their inmost selves to the devices that are the cause of their pain is the very demon of *romance* such as Europeans want.

What, then, is the legend really about? About the partings of the lovers? Yes, but in the name of passion, and for love of the very love that agitates them, in order that this love may be intensified and transfigured—at the cost of their happiness and even of their lives.

The secret and disturbing significance of the myth is beginning to loom out—the *peril* it at once expresses and veils, the passion to which to yield is like a swoon. But it is too late to turn away. We are affected, we are under the spell, we grow alive to the 'exquisite anguish'. It would be idle to condemn; swooning cannot be condemned. But is it not a philosopher's passion to meditate on swooning? Perhaps knowledge is but the effort of a mind that resists the headlong fall and holds back in the midst of temptation.

## THE LOVE OF LOVE

### VIII

## THE LOVE OF LOVE

*'De tous les maux, le mien diffère; il me plaît; je me réjouis de lui; mon mal est ce que je veux et ma douleur est ma santé. Je ne vois donc pas de quoi je me plains.'*

CHRESTIEN DE TROYES.

It is only 'silly' questions that can enlighten us; for behind whatever seems obvious lurks something that is not. Let us then boldly ask: Does Tristan care for Iseult, and she for him? The lovers do not seem to be brought together in any normal human way. On the contrary, at their first encounter they confine themselves to having ordinary polite relations; and later, when Tristan returns to Ireland to fetch Iseult, the politeness, it will be remembered, gives place to open hostility. Everything goes to show that they would never have chosen one another were they acting *freely*. But no sooner have they drunk the love-potion than passion flares up between them. Yet that any fondness supervenes to unite them as a result of the magic spell I have found, among the thousands of lines of the Romance, only a single indication. When, following Tristan's escape, it has been told how they have gone to live in the Forest of Morrois, there occur these lines:

Aspre vie meinent et dure:  
Tant s'entr'aiment de bone amor  
L'un par l'autre ne sent dolor.

If it should be imagined that poets in the Middle Ages were less emotional than we have now become and felt no need to insist on what goes without saying, let the account of the three years in the forest be read attentively. Its two finest passages—which are no doubt also the most profound passages in the whole legend—describe the



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lovers' two visits to the hermit Ogrin. The first time they go to see him; it is in order to make confession. But instead of confessing their sin and asking for absolution, they do their best to convince him that they are not to blame for what has befallen, since after all *they do not care for one another!*

Q'el m'aime, c'est par la poison  
Ge ne me pus de lié partir,  
N'ele de moi——

So speaks Tristan, and Iseult says after him: . .

Sire, por Dieu omnipotent, \*  
Il ne m'aime pas, ne je lui,  
Fors par un herbé dont je bui  
Et il en but: ce fu pechiez.

They are thus in a thrillingly contradictory position. They love, but not one another. They have sinned, but cannot repent; for they are not to blame. They make confession, but wish neither to reform nor even to beg forgiveness. Actually, then, like all other great lovers, they imagine that they have been ravished 'beyond good and evil' into a kind of transcendental state outside ordinary human experience, into an ineffable absolute irreconcilable with the world, but that they feel to be *more real than the world*. Their oppressive fate, even though they yield to it with wailings, obliterates the antithesis of good and evil, and carries them away beyond the source of moral values, beyond pleasure and pain, beyond the realm of distinctions—into a realm where opposites cancel out.

Their admission is explicit enough: 'Il ne m'aime pas, ne je lui.' Everything happens as if they could neither see nor recognize one another. They are the prisoners of 'exquisite anguish' owing to something which neither controls—some alien power independent of their capacities,

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or at any rate of their conscious wishes and of their being in so far as they are aware of being. Both characters, the man as much as the woman, are depicted physically and psychologically in an entirely conventional and rhetorical manner. He is 'the strongest'; she, 'the most beautiful'; he, the knight; she, the princess; and so on. It is impossible to believe that any human feeling can grow up between two such rudimentary characters. The friendship mentioned in connexion with the length of time the effect of the love-potion lasts is the opposite of a true friendship; and, what is still more striking, if moral friendship does at last appear, it is at the moment their passion declines. And the immediate consequence of this nascent friendship, far from being to knit them more closely together, is to make them feel that they have everything to gain from a separation. This last point deserves to be considered more closely.

L'endemain de la saint Jehan  
Aconpli furent li troi an.

Tristan is out in the forest after game. Suddenly he is reminded of the world. He sees in his mind's eye King Mark's castle. He sighs for 'the vair and grey' and for the pomp of chivalry. He thinks of the high rank he might hold among his uncle's barons. He thinks too of his beloved—apparently for the first time! But for him she might be 'in fine rooms . . . hung with cloth of silk'. Simultaneously Iseult is filled with similar regrets. In the evening they are together and they confess to one another what is newly agitating them—'en mal uson nostre jovente'. It does not take them long to agree to part. Tristan talks of making off to Brittany. But first they will seek out Ogrin the Hermit and beg his forgiveness—and at the same time King Mark's forgiveness of Iseult.

It is at this point that there occurs a highly dramatic short dialogue between the hermit and the two penitents:

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Amors par force vos demeine!<sup>1</sup>

Combien durra vostre folie ?

Trop avez mené ceste vie.

So Ogrin admonishes them.

Tristan li dist: or escoutez

Si longuement l'avons menée

Itel fu nostre destinée.

On top of this comes one more feature. When Tristan hears that the king agrees to Iseult's return:

Dex! dist Tristan, quel departie!

Mot est dolenz qui pert s'amic.

It is with his own pain that he commiserates; not a thought for 's'amie'! And she too, we are made to feel, finds it much more pleasant to be back with the king than she ever was with her lover—happier in the unhappiness of love than she ever was in the life they led together in the Morrois.

For that matter, later on—as we have seen—passion seizes the lovers again, notwithstanding that the effect of the love-potion has worn off, and this time they are so carried away that they die—'he by her, she by him'. The seeming *selfishness* of their love is enough to account for many of the 'chance' happenings and tricks of fate that obstruct their attainment of happiness. But the love itself, and its profound ambiguity, still want explaining. Selfishness, it is said, always ends in death. But that is as a final defeat. Theirs, on the contrary, requires death for its perfect fulfilment and triumph. To the problem this raises there is only one answer worthy of the myth.

<sup>1</sup> *Amors par force vos demeine*—the most poignant description of passion ever penned by a poet! We must pause to admire it. In a single line the whole of passion is summed up with a vigour of expression making all romanticism look pallid! Shall we ever recover this sturdy 'dialect of the heart'?

## THE LOVE OF DEATH

Tristan and Iseult do not love one another. They say they don't, and everything goes to prove it. *What they love is love and being in love.* They behave as if aware that whatever obstructs love must ensure and consolidate it in the heart of each and intensify it infinitely in the moment they reach the complete obstruction, which is death. Tristan loves the awareness that he is loving far more than he loves Iseult the Fair. And Iseult does nothing to hold Tristan. All she needs is her passionate dream. Their need of one another is in order to be aflame, and they do not need one another as they are. What they need is not one another's presence, but one another's absence. *Thus the partings of the lovers are dictated by their passion itself,* and by the love they bestow on their passion rather than on its satisfaction or on its living object. That is why the Romance abounds in obstructions, why when mutually encouraging their joint dream in which each remains solitary they show such astounding indifference, and why events work up in a romantic climax to a fatal apotheosis.

The duality is at once irrevocable and deliberate. 'Mot est dolenz qui pert s'amie', Tristan sighs: and yet he then already sees, glimmering in the depths of the approaching night, that hidden flame which absence rekindles.

## IX

## THE LOVE OF DEATH

But we must push on further still. Augustine's *amabam amare* is a poignant phrase with which he was not content. I have repeatedly referred to *obstruction*, and there is also the way the lovers' passion *produces obstruction*, its effects coinciding with those of narrative necessity and of the reader's suspense. Are this obstruction and its being pro-

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duced simply *pretexts* needed in order to enable the passion to progress, or are they connected with the passion in some more profound manner? If we delve into the recesses of the myth, we see that the obstructions and their being produced are what passion really *wants*.

I have shown that the Romance is given its motive power by the way the lovers are repeatedly parted and then reunited. For convenience, here once more, briefly, is what happens. Tristan, having landed in Ireland, meets Iseult and then parts from her without being in love. He turns up in Ireland again, and this time Iseult wants to kill him. They take ship together and drink the love-potion, and then sin. Next, Iseult is delivered up to Mark, and Tristan is banished from the castle. He and Iseult meet under a pine-tree, their talk being overheard by Mark. Tristan comes back to the castle, and Frocin and the barons discover evidence of his crime. They are parted. They meet again, and for three years go to live in the forest. Then, once more, they part. They meet at the hut of Orri the Woodman. Tristan goes away. He comes back, disguised as a poor pilgrim. He goes away again. The separation this time is prolonged, and he marries Iseult of the White Hand. Iseult the Fair is about to rejoin him when he dies. She dies too. More briefly still: They have one long spell together ('*L'aspre vie*'—'*The harsh life*'), to which corresponds a lengthy separation—and Tristan's marriage. First, the love-potion; lastly, the death of both. In between, furtive meetings.

They are led to part so often either by adverse external circumstances or by hindrances which Tristan devises; and it is to be noted that Tristan's behaviour varies according to which kind of cause is operating. When social circumstances—for example, Mark's presence, the barons' suspiciousness, the Judgement of God—threaten the lovers, Tristan leaps over the obstruction (this is symbolized by his leap from his own bed to the queen's). He then does

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not mind pain (his wound reopens) nor the danger to his life (he knows he is being spied upon). Passion is then so violent—so brutish, it might be said—that in the intoxication of his *déduit* (or delight) he is oblivious to pain and perils alike. Nevertheless, the blood flowing from his wound betrays him. This is the 'red stain' that apprises the king of what is happening. And it also apprises the reader of the lovers' secret—that they are seeking peril for its own sake. But so long as the peril comes from without, Tristan's prowess in overcoming it is assertion in behalf of life. At this stage Tristan is simply complying with the feudal practice of knights. He has to prove his 'valour' and show he is either the stronger or the more wily. We have seen that if he persevered in this direction he would carry off the queen, and that established law is only respected here because this gives the tale an excuse to rebound.

But the knight's demeanour becomes quite different when nothing external any longer separates the two lovers. Indeed, it becomes the opposite of what it has been. When Tristan puts his drawn sword between himself and Iseult although they are lying down fully clothed, this is again prowess, but on this occasion against himself, *at his own cost*. Since he himself has set up the obstruction, it is one *he cannot overcome*. It must not be overlooked that the hierarchy of events corresponds closely to the hierarchy of both the storyteller's and the reader's *preferences*. The most serious obstruction is thus the one most liked. It is the one most suited to intensifying passion. At this extreme, furthermore, the wish to part assumes an emotional value *greater than that of passion itself*. Death, in being the goal of passion, is also its end.

Yet the drawn sword is not the ultimate expression of the dark desire and of the actual *end* of passion (in both senses of the word 'end'). The admirable episode of the exchange of swords makes this clear. When the king comes upon the lovers lying asleep in the cave, he substi-

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tutes his own sword for his rival's. The meaning of this is that in place of the obstruction which the lovers have wanted and have deliberately set up he puts the sign of his social prerogative, a legal and objective obstruction. Tristan accepts the challenge, and thereby enables the *action* of the tale to rebound. At this point the word 'action' takes on a symbolical meaning. Action prevents 'passion' from being complete, for passion is 'what is suffered'—and its limit is death. In other words, the action here is a fresh postponement of passion, which means a delaying of Death.

There is a same shift as regards the two marriages occurring in the Romance, that of Iseult the Fair and the king and that of Iseult of the White Hand and Tristan. The first is an obstruction in fact. The concrete existence of a *husband* symbolizes its character, husbands being despised by courtly love. Making the obstruction that leads to adultery a husband is unimaginative, the excuse most readily thought of, and most in keeping with everyday experience.<sup>1</sup> See how Tristan shoves the husband aside, and enjoys making sport of him! But for the existence of a husband, the love of Tristan and Iseult would not have lasted beyond three years! And old Bérout showed his good sense in limiting the effect of the love-potion to that length of time:

La mere Yseut, qui le bolli,  
A trois anz d'amistié le fist.

But for the existence of a husband, the lovers would have had to get married; and it is unbelievable that Tristan should ever be in a position to marry Iseult. She typifies the woman a man does not marry; for, once she became his wife she would no longer be what she is, and he would no longer love her. Just think of a Mme. Tristan! It would be the negation of passion—at least of the passion we are

<sup>1</sup> Romanticism was later on to devise more refined excuses.

## THE LOVE OF DEATH

concerned with here. The spontaneous ardour of a love crowned and not thwarted is essentially of short duration. It is a flare-up doomed not to survive the effulgence of its fulfilment. But its *branding* remains, and this is what the lovers want to prolong and indefinitely to renew. That is why they go on summoning fresh perils. But these the knight's valour drives him to overcome, and so he has to go away, in quest of more profound and more intimate—and it even seems, more interior—experiences.

When Tristan is sighing quietly for his lost Iseult, the brother of Iseult of the White Hand thinks his friend must be in love with his sister. This confusion—produced by identity of name—is the sole 'cause' of Tristan's marrying. It is obvious that he could easily have cleared up the misunderstanding. But here again honour supervenes—of course as a mere pretext—to prevent him from drawing back. The reason is that he foresees, in this new ordeal which is *self-imposed*, the opportunity of a decisive advance. This merely formal marriage with a woman he finds beautiful is an obstruction he can overcome only by achieving a victory *over himself* (as well as over the institution of marriage, which he thus damages from within). This time his prowess goes against him. His chastity now he is married corresponds to the placing of the drawn sword between himself and the other Iseult. But a self-imposed chastity is a symbolical suicide (here is the hidden meaning of the sword)—a victory for the courtly ideal over the sturdy Celtic tradition which proclaimed its pride in life. It is a way of purifying desire of the spontaneous, brutish, and active elements still encumbering it. 'Passion' triumphs over desire. Death triumphs over life.

Hence Tristan's inclination for a *deliberate obstruction* turns out to be a desire for death and an advance in the direction of Death! But this death is for love, a deliberate death coming at the end of a series of ordeals thanks to which he has been purified; a death that means transfigura-



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tion, and is in no way the result of some violent chance. Hence the aim is still to transform an external into an internal fate, which the lovers deliberately embrace. *In dying for love they redeem their destiny and are avenged for the love-potion.* So that at the last the struggle between passion and obstruction is inverted. At this point the obstruction is no longer serving irresistible passion, but has itself become the goal and end wished for for its own sake. Passion has thus only played the part of a purifying ordeal, it might almost be said of a penance, in the service of this transfiguring death. Here we are within sight of the ultimate secret.

The love of love has concealed a far more awful passion, a desire altogether unavowable, something that could only be 'betrayed' by means of symbols such as that of the drawn sword and that of perilous chastity. Unawares and in spite of themselves, the lovers have never had but one desire—the desire for death! Unawares, and passionately deceiving themselves, they have been seeking all the time simply to be redeemed and avenged for 'what they have suffered'—the passion unloosed by the love-potion. In the innermost recesses of their hearts they have been obeying the fatal dictates of a wish for death; they have been in the throes of *the active passion of Night.*

## X

## THE LOVE-POTION

And thereupon we perceive, now that it is half-disclosed, what caused the *myth* to take form and the very necessity whereby it was brought forth. So dreadful and unutterable is the real meaning of passion that not only are those persons who undergo it unable to grow aware of its end, but

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also writers wishing to depict it in all its extraordinary violence are driven to employ the *deceptive* language of symbols. I shall set aside for the moment the question whether or not the authors of the five original poems were aware of what they were writing about. First of all, it is imperative to make plain what is implied in the word 'deceptive' which I have just used.

Thanks to the popularization of psycho-analysis, we now commonly take it for granted that the existence of a repressed wish is invariably manifested, though in such a way as to disguise the true nature of this wish. A forbidden passion or a shameful love finds expression in the symbols of a hieroglyphic language which consciousness leaves undeciphered. The language is essentially equivocal; it 'betrays' in both senses of the verb what it wishes to say without saying it. A single gesture or a single metaphor may thus express at one and the same time both the object of a wish and what condemns the wish. The prohibition is thus recognized, and the object is not, and yet the latter is being alluded to. In this way irreconcilable demands are to some extent simultaneously satisfied. Two needs—that of speaking of what delights, and that of avoiding to decide whether the delightful is good or bad—and two instincts—that of courting danger and that of taking care—are all four gratified. If a man using this language is asked why he has a predilection for this or that apparently weird image, he will answer that 'it's perfectly natural', that 'he hasn't the remotest idea', or that 'he doesn't think it matters'. If he is a poet, he will drag in inspiration or poetic licence. In no circumstances will he have any hesitation in showing that he is in no way *responsible*.

Now, consider the problem that must have confronted the author of the original Romance. The symbolical material available in the twelfth century for concealing what had also to be expressed was magic, on the one hand, and the rhetoric of chivalry on the other. How convenient are

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these forms of expression is something immediately obvious. Magic persuades without giving reasons, and is perhaps persuasive to precisely the extent that it withholds reasons. Like all rhetoric, the rhetoric of chivalry is a means of passing off the most obscure statements as 'natural'. It was an ideal mask, for it ensured secrecy all right, and also ensured that a reader's approval would be *unconditional*. Chivalry was the rule which the leading caste was hoping to employ to check the wild 'follies' that it felt to be threatening the framework of its society. The customs of chivalry were thus bound to supply the Romance with its armature. And I have repeatedly indicated how the prohibitions of chivalry prove to be 'perfect' pretexts for the progression of the narrative. Magic comes in because passion has to be depicted as so sweetly overwhelming as not to be accepted without qualms. Passion appears uncouth in its effects. The Church proscribes it as sinful, and common sense looks upon it as a morbid excess. It is thus not open to admiration till it has been freed from every kind of visible connexion with human responsibility. That is why it was indispensable to bring in the love-potion, which acts willy-nilly, and—better still—is drunk by mistake.<sup>1</sup>

The love-potion is thus an *alibi* for passion. It enables each of the two unhappy lovers to say: 'You see, I am not in the least to blame; you see, it's more than I can help.' Yet, thanks to this deceptive necessity, everything they do is directed towards the fatal fulfilment they are in love with, and they can approach this fulfilment with a kind of crafty determination and a cunning the more unerring for not being open to moral judgement. Our least calculated actions are sometimes the most effective. A stone which we

<sup>1</sup> Thomas, who seeks to minimize the part played by this magical influence, is driven to making passion less inhuman and hence more tolerable to a moralist. Inferior in this respect to Bérout, he is the first of the writers who have degraded the myth.

## THE LOVE-POTION

throw 'without aiming' hits the mark. Actually, we aimed at the mark all right, but consciousness was not given time to interfere and deflect our spontaneous movement. That is why the finest passages in the Romance are those where the authors did not see how to dilate upon events and wrote as if in perfect innocence. There would be no myth and no romance if Tristan and Iseult were able *to say* what is the end they are making ready for in the depths—indeed, in the abyss—of their wills. But they do not dare admit that they seek Death and detest offensive Day, and that what they long for with all their being is the annihilation of their being.

Much later on there arose poets who dared make this crowning avowal. But the masses said of them: 'They are mad!' And the passion which most novelists wish to please in the reader is seemingly something weaker. It is unlikely ever to be driven to proclaim itself by undeniable excess, by a death in which it would be manifested beyond any possible repentance! Some of the mystics have gone further than avowal. They have understood and explained. But if they were able to face 'the Dark Night' with a most strict and clear-sighted passion, it was because through faith they had won a pledge that an altogether personal and 'luminous' Will would take the place of theirs. Their will power was not seized upon by the nameless god of the love-potion, a blind force or Nothingness, but by the God Who promises His grace, and 'the living flame of love' that burns in the 'deserts' of the Night.

But Tristan can make no avowal. His longing is as if he had it not. He confines himself inside an unverifiable and unjustifiable 'truth', from any understanding of which he recoils with horror. He has his excuse ready, and it is pervasively specious: it is the poison which 'par force le demeine'. And yet, that he has chosen his fate, and willed and welcomed it in a dark and complete assent, is betrayed by everything he does, down to his desperate flight, a

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sublime coxcombry! And at the same time it is essential to the exemplary grandeur of his life that he should be unaware of this fate. Night has its reasons which are not those of Day, and they cannot be made known to Day.<sup>1</sup> Day they despise. Tristan has delivered himself over to a madness that must rob him of wisdom, 'truth,' and life itself. He has travelled beyond our pleasure and pain. He is hastening forward to the supreme moment in which delight is all concentrated on *foundering*.

Night cannot be described in the language of Day. But this particular form of desire has not lacked, and has indeed produced, an 'artful music'. Arise, deep-sounding tempests of Tristan and Isolde's death! The hero sings:

Old tune so full of sadness  
That sing'st thy sad complaint.  
Through evening breezes came that strain,  
as once my father's death I learned in childhood;  
through morning twilight, sadder sounding,  
as to me my mother's fate was told.  
He who begot me died, she dying gave me birth.  
The olden ditty's mournful plaint,  
E'en so to them its numbers came,

<sup>1</sup> In Wagner's drama, when the king surprises the lovers and asks 'for the undiscovered deep and secret cause of all', Tristan replies (F. Jameson's translation of the poem):

King Marke, that *I can never tell thee*;  
and what thou ask'st that canst thou ne'er discover.

Later, when dying, Tristan says too:

Where I awoke I stayed not;  
yet where I tarried, that *I can never tell thee*. . . .  
It was where I had been for ever,  
Where I for aye shall go:  
the boundless realm of night's domain.  
There one thing alone is ours:  
deep, eternal, all forgetting! . . .  
This terrible yearning wasting my heart;  
*if I could name it, if thou couldst know it!*

that strain that asked, that asks me still,  
what fate for me was chosen,  
when there my mother bore me,  
what fate for me?

The olden ditty once more tells me:  
'tis yearning and dying! . . .

•Yearning now calls

He may curse his stars and his birth, but the music is indeed artful, and magnificently its notes make known the lovely secret. It is he himself who has willed his fate.

The terrible draught that this anguish has brought,  
'tis I myself by whom it was wrought! . . .

What I have drunken,

XII

Passion means suffering, something undergone, fate's mastery over a free and responsible person. To love love more than the object of love, to love passion for its own sake, has been to love to suffer and to court suffering all the way from Augustine's *amabam amare* down to modern Romanticism. Passionate love, the longing for what sears us and annihilates us in its triumph—there is the secret which Europe has never allowed to be given away; a secret it has always repressed—and preserved! Hardly anything could be more tragic; and the way passion has persisted through the centuries should cause us to look to the future with deep despondency.

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consideration. Both passion and the longing for death which passion disguises are connected with and fostered by a particular notion of how to reach understanding which in itself is typical of the Western *psyche*. Why does Western Man wish to suffer this passion which lacerates him and which all his common sense rejects? Why does he yearn after this particular kind of love notwithstanding that its effulgence must coincide with his self-destruction? The answer is that he reaches self-awareness and tests himself only by risking his life—in suffering and on the verge of death. The third act of Wagner's drama represents far more than a romantic disaster; it represents the *essential disaster* of our sadistic genius—the repressed longing for death, for self-experience to the utmost, for the revealing shock, a longing which beyond question manifests the deepest root of the war instinct we nourish.

From this tragic extreme—illustrated, avowed, and evidenced by the myth in its pristine purity—let us step down to passionate experience as men undergo it to-day. The tremendous success of the Tristan Romance shows, whether we like it or not, that we have a secret preference for what is unhappy. According to the sturdiness of our spirit, this unhappiness may be the 'delightful sadness' and spleen of nineteenth-century decadence, a transfiguring torment, or a challenge which the mind flings down to the world. But in any case what we pursue is what promises to uplift and excite us, so that in spite of ourselves we shall be transported into the 'real life' spoken of by poets. But this 'real life' is an impossible one. What is heralded by the sky with high-riding clouds and by the empurpled heroic sunset is not Day; it is Night! 'Real life is *elsewhere*', Rimbaud said. 'Real life' indeed is but another name for Death, and the only name we have dared to *invoke* it by—even while we were pretending to fend it off. Why is it that we delight most of all in some tale of impossible love? Because we long for the *branding*; because we long

## UNHAPPY MUTUAL LOVE

to grow aware of what is on fire inside us. Suffering and understanding are deeply connected; death and self-awareness are in league;<sup>1</sup> and European romanticism may be compared to a man for whom sufferings, and especially the sufferings of love, are a privileged mode of understanding.

Of course this is only true of the best romantics. Most people do not bother about understanding or about self-awareness; they merely go after the kind of love that promises the most *sensation*. But even this has to be a love delayed in its happy fulfilment by some obstruction. Hence, whether our desire is for the most self-conscious or simply the most intense love, secretly we desire obstruction. And this obstruction we are ready if needs be to invent or imagine.

This seems to me to explain much of our psychological nature. Unless the course of love is being hindered there is no 'romance'; and it is romance that we revel in—that is to say, the self-consciousness, intensity, variations, and delays of passion, together with its climax rising to disaster—not its sudden flaring. Consider our literature. The happiness of lovers stirs our feelings only on account of the unhappiness which lies in wait for it. We must feel that life is imperilled, and also feel the hostile realities that drive happiness away into some remote background. What moves us is not its presence, but its nostalgia and recollection. Presence is inexpressible and has no perceptible duration; it can only be a *moment* of grace—as in the duet of Don Giovanni and Zerlina. Otherwise we lapse into a picture-postcard idyll. Happy love has no history—in *European literature*. And a love that is not mutual cannot pass for a true love. The outstanding find made by European poets, what distinguishes them first and foremost among the writers of the world, what most profoundly expresses

<sup>1</sup> On this alliance Hegel was able to ground a general explanation of the human mind, and also of human history.



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the European obsession by suffering as a way to understanding, is the secret of the Tristan myth; passionate love at once shared and fought against, anxious for a happiness it rejects, and magnified in its own disaster—*unhappy mutual love*.

Let us pause at this description of the myth.

The love is *mutual* in the sense that Tristan and Iseult 'love one another', or, at least, believe that they do. Certainly their mutual fidelity is exemplary. But *unhappiness* comes in, because the love agitating them is not a love of each for the other as that other really is. They love one another, but each loves the other *from the standpoint of self and not from the other's standpoint*. Their unhappiness thus originates in a false reciprocity, which disguises a twin narcissism. So much is this so that at times there pierces through their excessive passion a kind of hatred of the beloved. Long before Freud and modern psychology Wagner saw this. 'By me chosen, lost by me!' Isolde sings in her frantic love. And the sailor's opening song from the mast-head predicts the inevitable fate of them both:

Westward sweeps the eye, eastward on we fly.  
The wind so wild blows homeward now:  
my Irish child, where tarriest thou?  
Sighs from thy heart ascending,  
help to our sails are lending!  
Sigh, ah sigh, wind so wild!  
Sigh, ah sigh now, my child!  
O Irish maid, thou wayward, winsome maid!

Their passion is twice unhappy in that it flees from both reality and the Norm of Day. The essential unhappiness of this love is that what they desire they have not yet had—this is Death—and that what they had is now being lost—the enjoyment of life. And yet far from this loss being felt as privation, the couple imagine that they are now more fully alive than ever and are more than ever living dange-

## ‘OLD TUNE SO FULL OF SADNESS’

rously and intensely. The approach of death acts as a goad to sensuality. In the full sense of the verb, it aggravates desire. Sometimes even it aggravates desire to the point of turning this into a wish to kill either the beloved or oneself, or to founder in a twin downrush.

Hear now my will, ye craven winds! [Isolde begins by singing]

come forth to strife and stress of the storm!  
to turbulent tempests' clamour and fury!  
Drive from her dreams this slumbering sea;  
wake from the depths all her envious greed!  
Destroy now this insolent ship  
let its wreck be sunk in her waves!  
All that hath life and breath upon it,  
I leave to you winds as your prize!

Drawn to a death remote from the life that has been spurring them on, the lovers are doomed to become the voluptuous prey of conflicting forces that will cast both into the same headlong swoon. For they can never be united till, bereft of all hope and of all possible love, they reach the heart of utter obstruction and experience the supreme elevation which is destroyed in being fulfilled.

## XII

## ‘OLD TUNE SO FULL OF SADNESS’

In summarizing the Romance from an objective standpoint, we were led to detect in it a number of contradictions; and in supposing that the author really intended to illustrate how the rule of chivalry conflicted with feudal custom we were led to see how these contradictions came about. Thereupon we set out to find the real theme of the

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legend. The author sides with the rule of chivalry, and in doing so betrays a hankering after the romantic. This in turn betrays a hankering after love for its own sake, which implies a secret quest of the obstructions that shall foster love. But this quest is only the disguise of a love for obstruction *per se*. Now, it turns out that the ultimate obstruction is death, and at the close of the tale death is revealed as having been the real end, what passion has yearned after from the beginning, the avenging of a fate that, having been suffered, is now at last redeemed.

Although the secrets disclosed by an analysis of the myth are of considerable import, the inward private assurances of what is their nature are likely to be rejected by the collective mind. My description has necessarily had to follow the meanderings of the internal logic of the Romance, and I realize that its dryness may seem vaguely damaging. It remains that my interpretation has enabled us to come upon some fundamental relations where they were in process of being formed, and that these relations subtend our fate. In so far as *passionate love* endows the myth with a new youth through its effect upon our own lives, it is henceforth impossible to overlook how it stands for a radical condemnation of *marriage*. The ending of the myth shows that passion is an *askesis*,<sup>1</sup> and that as such it is all the more effectively in opposition to earthly life that it takes the form of desire, and that, as desire, it simulates fatality.

Incidentally, I have mentioned that such a love is profoundly connected with our liking for *war*.

Furthermore, if passion and the need of passion are indeed aspects of a Western means of coming to understand,

<sup>1</sup> The word 'ascèse', though not included in standard dictionaries, has lately become very popular with French religious writers. The word is a French adaptation of the Greek *ἀσκησις* = exercise, training, practice. It serves to indicate a religious preparation and training. Being a neologism, it will here be rendered throughout by 'askesis'.—Translator.

## ‘OLD TUNE SO FULL OF SADNESS’

we must consider—at least interrogatively—the existence of one more relation, which may ultimately turn out to be the most fundamental of all. We must ask ourselves if to understand through suffering is not the capital feature as well as the daring element in our most clear-sighted *mysticism*. The two passions—the erotic (in a higher sense) and the mystical—speak a same language, whether because either is cause or effect of the other or because they have had a common origin—and perhaps both sound to our ears the same ‘old tune so full of sadness’ which Wagner’s drama orchestrates:

That strain that asked, that asks me still,  
what fate for me was chosen . . .  
what fate for me?  
The olden ditty once more tells me:  
’tis yearning and dying!

Thanks to a ‘physiognomical’ examination of the shape and structure of the Romance, I have succeeded in setting forth the original content of the myth in all its harsh and noble purity. Two ways now beckon—one leading back to the historical and religious background of the myth, the other down from the myth to our own time. Let us take each way in turn without presuppositions. Here and there I shall pause to verify this or that clearly localized origin or this or that unforeseen consequence of the *relations* which have now been laid bare.



## *Book Two*

### *The Religious Origins*



## I

### THE NATURAL AND SACRED 'OBSTRUCTION'

People to-day are all materialists more or less, for they are the heirs of the nineteenth century. They only need to be shown some crude mimicry of 'mental' events in nature or in instinct, and they fancy that the 'mental' has been explained. *It is whatever is lower that we take to be more real.* The superstition of our time expresses itself in a mania for equating the sublime with the trivial and for quaintly mistaking a merely necessary condition for a sufficient cause. The mania usurps the name of 'scientific integrity', and is defended on the ground that it emancipates the mind from delusions about 'spirit'. Yet it is difficult to see how there can be any emancipation in 'explaining' Dostoievsky by epilepsy or Nietzsche by syphilis. To deny the existence of mind is a curious way of ensuring its freedom. But however much I protest beforehand, no sooner do I admit that in instinct and sex there are spontaneous reactions analogous in some respects to those occurring in the passion of the Tristan myth than many people will suppose that this settles the matter so far as I am concerned. They are bound to think that the obstruction which has so often cropped up in the course of my analysis of the myth is something altogether natural. To delay pleasure is the most elementary of the wiles of desire; and man is 'so made' as sometimes to subject himself to a semi-instinctive continence for the benefit of the species. Lycurgus, the Spartan legislator, required newly married husbands to remain continent for a considerable time. Plutarch says<sup>1</sup> his

<sup>1</sup> North's translation.



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reason was that 'it kept their bodies in strength and better state, to bring forth children', and that 'it continued also in both parties a still burning love, and a newe desire of the one to the other'. Likewise feudal chivalry, it will be said, looked upon chastity as an instinctive obstruction to the assertion of instinct, and extolled it in order that warriors might be the better fitted to show valour.

But it is only in relation to life that discipline of this sort can have any value; not in relation to the mind. Such discipline yields to its own success; it aims at nothing ulterior. Lycurgus's eugenics were in no way ascetic; on the contrary, he aimed at the better propagation of the species. The processes which secure the perpetuation of life cannot be anything more than the physiological *concomitant* of the reactions of passion. Of course passion has to make use of the body and to obey its laws. But to recognize in what the laws of the body consist does nothing to explain, for example, why Tristan loves as he does. In fact, the recognition serves but to render more conspicuous the presence of some additional and 'alien' factor, a factor having the power to make instinct turn away from its natural goal and to transform desire into *limitless* aspiration, into something, that is to say, which does not serve, and indeed operates against, biological ends. The same can be said of suggestions that the motives of behaviour characteristic of the Romance originated in the sacred customs and taboos of primitive peoples. Nothing is easier than to connect the distant *quest* of a bride with the custom of nuptial abduction observed among exogamic tribes, and to imagine that *prowess* was encouraged because it was an undisguised sublimation of much older customs inspired by nature in order to achieve biological selection. Even the *longing for death* can be assimilated to *the death instinct* that Freud and the latest biologists refer to.

But nothing in all this will explain the belated appearance

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of the myth, still less its localization in European history. Antiquity has left no record of an experience akin to the love of Tristan and Iseult. It is well known that the Greeks and Romans looked on love as a sickness—the expression is Menander's—whenever it went, no matter how little, beyond the sensual pleasure which was considered to be its natural expression. Plutarch, and—as I shall show in a moment—Plato also, call love 'a frenzy'. We are thus led to ask whence arose the glorification of passion, which is precisely the feature of the Romance that we find moving. To speak of a deflexion of instinct is to say nothing, inasmuch as what we want to know is indeed how the deflexion was caused.

## II

### EROS, OR BOUNDLESS DESIRE

Plato, alike in the *Phaedrus* and in the *Symposium*, speaks of a frenzy that, spreading from the body, infects the spirit with malignant humours. This is not love as he commends it. But there is, he says, another kind of frenzy or delirium which is neither conceived nor born in a man's soul except by the inspiration of heaven. It is alien to us, its spell is wrought from without; it is a transport, an infinite rapture away from reason and natural sense. It is therefore to be called *enthusiasm*, a word which actually means 'possessed by a god', for the frenzy not only is of heavenly origin, but culminates at its highest in a new attainment of the divine.

Such is Platonic love.<sup>1</sup> It is 'a divine delirium', a trans-

<sup>1</sup> I am of course aware that Socrates is made to say in the *Phaedrus* that the greatest satisfaction of the lover comes, not from physical fulfilment, but from consciousness of the joint attainment by lover and beloved of self-mastery; and in the

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port of the soul, a madness and supreme sanity both. A lover with his beloved becomes 'as if in heaven'; for love is the way that ascends by degrees of ecstasy to the one source of all that exists, remote from bodies and matter, remote from what divides and distinguishes, and beyond the misfortune of being a self and even in love itself a pair.

Eros is complete Desire, luminous Aspiration, the primitive religious soaring carried to its loftiest pitch, to the extreme 'exigency of purity which is also the extreme exigency of Unity. But absolute unity must be the negation of the present human being in his suffering multiplicity. The supreme soaring of desire ends in non-desire. The erotic process introduces into life an element foreign to the diastole and systole of sexual attraction—a desire that never relapses, that nothing can satisfy, that even rejects and flees the temptation to obtain its fulfilment in the world, because its demand is to embrace no less than the All. It is *infinite transcendence*, man's rise into his god. And this rise is *without return*.

Little has so far been discovered about the antecedents of Platonism, but they are certainly Iranian and Orphic. And through Plotinus the Platonic doctrine of love was transmitted to the medieval world. That is how the East came to brood over our lives and hence to stir up some very remote memories. For in the depths of the West the voices of Celtic filids and bards gave answer. Comparative mythology is the most speculative of enterprises, unless we except etymology from which it often derives. Both are constantly at the mercy of some strongly tempting pun. But it is not necessary to invoke the theory according to

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*Symposium* that erotic passion at its highest is a delight in beauty of every kind, so that the lover who has ascended high enough will descry the supreme, eternal, selfsame, and perfect beauty, the reality and substance of that in which everything else called beauty is a participant. But I am concerned above all with what European culture generally has preserved of Plato.

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which the most ancient of Celtic myths are akin to the Greek—the quest of the Holy Grail being regarded as another form of the quest of the Golden Fleece, the Pythagorean theories of reincarnation as another version of druidical beliefs about immortality. For, whatever that theory may be worth, recent investigation has detected general convergences in support of the view that the religious beliefs of East and West had a common source.

The Celts spread over Europe from the Atlantic to the Black Sea long before the Romans embarked upon their conquests. But the Celts were not a nation. They were loosely held together by a civilization or culture which had its spiritual centre in the sacerdotal college of the druids. The college had not emanated from any single small tribe; it was 'a kind of international institution' and served every people of Celtic race from the remote corners of Britain and Ireland across to Italy and Asia Minor. The druids were grouped in brotherhoods, and had very wide powers. They were soothsayers, magicians, medicine-men, priests, and teachers all in one. They set nothing down in writing, but by word of mouth, in gnostic verses, they taught pupils for whom the course of instruction lasted twenty years.

The sacerdotal college of the druids was not unique. Iranian magi, Indian brahmans, Roman pontiffs and flamens, have been credited with identical institutions; and that 'flamen' is the same name as 'brahman' indicates that the functions of each of these various kinds of priests were fundamentally akin.

However, as regards the Celts, there is no doubt that they believed in a life after death. They pictured that life to themselves as one filled with adventure—very like the life led on earth, but purified. They even supposed that some of their heroes were enabled *to return* from the hereafter, and under other names to mingle with the living. It is through this central doctrine of soul survival that the

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Celts are akin to the Greeks. But every doctrine of immortality implies a tragic preoccupation with death. The Celts, according to Hubert,<sup>1</sup> 'certainly elaborated a metaphysic of death. They had meditated on death a great deal. It had grown into a familiar companion, *whose disturbing nature, however, they deliberately disguised.*' And Hubert remarks further that in Celtic mythology 'the notion of death is found to predominate over all things, and *all things are a reminder of it*'. These statements invite juxtaposition with what I have said above about the Tristan myth, which both veils and expresses a longing for death.

Celtic gods, furthermore, formed two opposite sets, *light* and *dark*. It is important to stress this fundamental *dualism* in the religion of the druids. For that is where Iranian, Gnostic and Hindu myths converge upon the basic religion of Europe. From India to the shores of the Atlantic, though in the most varied forms, there is expressed a same mystery of Day and Night and a same mystery of the *fatal* struggle going on between them inside men. There is a god of uncreated and timeless Light, and there is a god of Darkness, the author of evil, who holds sway over all visible Creation. Centuries before Manes appeared, this opposition had already been established in Indo-European mythologies. Ahura Mazda (or Ormuzd) in Persia, the Greek Apollo, the Celtiberian Abellion, were all gods of Light; and the Sanskrit Dyaus Pitar, the Iranian Ahriman, the Hellenistic Zeus Pater, the Latin Jupiter, and the Gallic Dispater, gods of Darkness.

Of direct interest for our purpose, Woman in the eyes of the druids was a being divine and prophetic. She is typified by the Germanic Velleda, who in Chateaubriand's *Martyrs* appears by night to a Roman general lost in reverie. 'Do you know', she says to him, 'that I am a spirit?' Eros has taken the guise of Woman, and symbolizes both the other world and the nostalgia which makes us despise earthly

<sup>1</sup> H. Hubert, *Les Celtes* (Paris, 1932), I, p. 18, and II, p. 328.

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joys. But the symbol is ambiguous, since it tends to mingle sexual attraction with *eternal* desire. The Essylt mentioned in sacred legends as being both 'an object of contemplation and a mystic vision' stirred up a yearning for what lies beyond embodied forms. Although she was beautiful and desirable for herself, it was her nature to vanish. 'The Eternal feminine leads us away', Goethe said, and 'Woman is man's goal', according to Novalis.

Thus the yearning for Light was symbolized by the nocturnal attraction of sex. In the eyes of the flesh, uncreated broad Day was but Night, even as our day corresponded for the god dwelling beyond the stars to the realm of Dis-pater, the Father of Shadows. There is a kinship here with the yearning *to founder* shown by the Wagnerian Tristan, although in the case of that particular Tristan he yearns to founder only in order that he may rise again into a Heaven of Light. The 'Night' he sings of is Uncreated Day. And his passion is the cult of Eros; his Desire despises Venus even when he is in the throes of carnal desire and imagines himself to be in love. There has been too much talk about Nirvana and Buddhism in connexion with Wagner's opera. The pagan background of the West was more than ample for the needs of a magician who wished to brew his love-potion with active ingredients. For that matter, it is significant that the original Celtic cult should have survived both the Roman conquest and the Germanic invasions. 'The Gallo-Romans were mostly Celts in disguise, so that after the Germanic invasions Celtic fashions and inclinations re-appeared in Gaul.'<sup>1</sup> Both Romanesque art and the Romance languages witness to the wealth of the Celtic inheritance. Later on, it was thanks to the monks in Britain and Ireland—the two countries where the bardic legends had been preserved, and preserved, as it happens, by the clergy—that Europe was evangelized and brought back to the study of

<sup>1</sup> Hubert, *op. cit.*, I, p. 20. In the same way, the Gallic gods were given Latin names, but were not otherwise altered.

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letters. This carries us to the threshold of the period in which the Tristan myth sprang up.

However, closer to us than either Plato or the druids, a kind of Indo-European unity may be seen looming out like a watermark upon the background of medieval heresies. As early as the third century, there spread over the geographical and historical area that is bounded by India on the one hand and by Britain on the other, a religion that syncretized all the myths of Night and Day, a religion which had been elaborated first in Persia and then by the Gnostic and Orphic sects. This religion actually spread underground, and it is known as Manichaeism. The very difficulty there is to-day in describing it must be held to indicate how deep-seated it was and the extent of its human importance. For one thing, everywhere the authorities and orthodoxies persecuted it with incredible violence. It was looked upon as the gravest of social perils. Its followers were slaughtered, its writings scattered and burned, so that ever since down to the present day any attempts to form an estimate of it have had to rely almost entirely on the testimony of its foes. It would seem further that the doctrine of the Persian prophet Manes assumed forms that varied widely according to what beliefs were already established among the peoples to whom it spread—Christians, Buddhists, or Mohammedans. In a Manichaean hymn recently retrieved and translated, Jesus, Manes, Ormuzd, and Sakyamuni are invoked one after the other, and finally so is Zardusht—that is to say, Zarathustra or Zoroaster. And there is reason to suppose, furthermore, that the existence of Celtic survivals in the French area of the Languedoc provided certain Manichaean sects with a particularly favourable soil.

For the understanding of what is to follow, two points in particular need to be stressed.

1. The fundamental dogma of all Manichaean sects is that the soul is divine or angelic, and is *imprisoned* in

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created forms—in terrestrial matter, which is Night. In the hymn called *The Soul's Fate*, a disciple of the saviour Manes causes his spiritual self to lament:

I came out of light and the gods.  
Here in exile am I from them kept apart.

I am a god, of the gods I was born,  
But now I am made to know pain.

The soul's impulse to seek the Light has a kinship with the 'reminiscence of Beauty' referred to in the Platonic dialogues, and also with the nostalgia felt by the Celtic hero when, having come back to earth from heaven, he recalls the existence of the isle where the immortals dwell. But the impulse is constantly being checked by the jealousy of Venus (who, in the hymn just quoted, goes by the name of Dibat). Even after a lover has become possessed by the yearning for light, Venus wants him to remain within dark matter. Hence there ensues the struggle between sexual love and Love, and it is a struggle displaying the fundamental *anguish* felt by fallen angels while confined in bodies all too human.

2. It has recently been shown—and this is very important for what we are seeking to find out—that the structure of the Manichaean faith was 'in essence lyrical'. In other words, the nature of this faith made it unamenable to rational, impersonal, and 'objective' exposition. Actually, it could only come to be held in being experienced, and the experience of it was one of combined dread and enthusiasm—that is to say, of invasion by the divine—which is essentially poetic. The cosmogony and theogony of this faith became 'true' for a believer only when certitude was induced by his recital of a *psalm*. So Tristan, it will be recalled, cannot state his secret, only sing it.

Every dualistic—let us say, every Manichaean—interpretation of the universe holds the fact of being alive to be



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the absolute woe, the woe embracing all other woes; and death it holds to be the *ultimate* good, whereby the sin of birth is redeemed and human souls return into the One of luminous indistinction. We may already attain to Light while here below through a gradual ascent which is achieved in the progressive death of a deliberate *askesis*. But the goal and the end of the spirit is also the end of life: it is death. Eros, object of our supreme Desire, intensifies all our desires only in order to offer them up in sacrifice. The fulfilment of Love is the denial of any particular terrestrial love, and its Bliss of any particular terrestrial bliss. *From the standpoint of life*, it is this Love which is the absolute woe.

There we have the broad Eastern and Western background of paganism out of which the Tristan myth sprang. It has now to be asked how indeed the myth should have come out of this background; what prohibitions and perils compelled this doctrine to put on veils and no longer to proclaim itself except in deceptive symbols, no longer to allure us except by means of the spell and secret incantation of a myth.

## III

### AGAPE, OR CHRISTIAN LOVE

The Gospel according to Saint John opens as follows:

‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.’

This might seem to be another expression of the eternal and relentless dualism according to which terrestrial Night and transcendent Day are irrevocably hostile. But no. The Gospel continues:

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‘And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.’

The incarnation of the Word in the world—and of Light in Darkness—is the astounding event whereby we are delivered from the woe of being alive. And this event, in being the centre of the whole of Christianity, is the focus of that Christian love which in Scripture is called *agape*.<sup>1</sup>

The event is unique, and not to be believed ‘naturally’. Because for the Incarnation to have occurred is the radical negation of every kind of *religion*—the ultimate offence, not only to our reason, which is unable to countenance the absurd running together of the infinite and the finite, but also and especially to any natural religious disposition. Every known religion tends to *sublimate* man, and leads to the condemning of his ‘finite’ life. Our desires are intensified and sublimated by the god Eros through being embraced in a single Desire whereby they are abolished. The final goal of the process is to attain what is not life—the death of the body. Night and Day being incompatible, and men being deemed creatures of Night, men can only achieve salvation by ceasing to be, by being ‘lost’ in the bosom of the divine. But in Christianity, thanks to its dogma of the incarnation of the Christ in Jesus, this process is completely inverted. Death, from being the last *term*, is become the first condition. What the Gospel calls dying to self is the *beginning* of a new *life* already *here below*—not the soul’s flight out of the world, but its return in force into the midst of the world. It is an immediate recreation, a reassertion of life—not of course of the old life, and not of an ideal life, but of our present life now re-

<sup>1</sup> It is perhaps of interest to mention here, since the author’s contrast between Christianity and Catharism is not thereby necessarily affected, that the most important ceremony among the Cathars, the initiation of a Believer to the rank of a Perfect, concluded with the recital of Saint John, i. 1–17.—Translator.

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possessed by the Spirit. God—the real God—has been made man—a real man. Darkness has ‘comprehended’ the light in the person of Jesus Christ. And every man born of woman who *believes* this is born again of the spirit here and now—dead to himself and dead to the world in so far as self and world are sinful, but restored to himself and to the world in so far as the Spirit wants to save them.

Thereupon to love is no longer to flee and persistently to reject the act of love. Love now still begins beyond death, but from that beyond it returns to life. And in being thus converted love brings forth our *neighbour*. Eros had treated a fellow-creature as but an illusory excuse and occasion for taking fire; and forthwith this creature had had to be given up, for the intention was ever to burn more fiercely, to burn to death! Individual beings were but so many defects and eclipsings of the one and only Being; and as such none was susceptible of being really loved. Salvation lay *hereafter*, and a religious-minded person forsook the creatures from whom his god had turned away. But God has not forsaken us. ‘*He first loved us*’—loved us as we are and with our limitations; and these He even went so far as to put on, making Himself as one of us. In thus putting on, though without sin and without self-division, the garment of sinful and manifold men, the Love of God has opened an entirely new way to us—the way of *holiness*. And the way is the contrary of the sublimation that had been an illusory flight out of the concreteness of life. To love according to this new way is a positive act and an act of transformation. Eros had pursued infinite becoming. Christian love is obedience in the present. For to love God is *to obey* God, Who has commanded us to love one another. *To love your enemies* is to shed selfishness and the desirous and anxious self; it means the death of the solitary human being, but it also means the birth of our neighbour. In reply to the ironical question: ‘Who is my neighbour?’ Jesus answered: ‘Whoever has need of you.’ From that

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moment every human relation has been given a new *direction* in being given a new *meaning*.

The symbol of Love is no longer the infinite *passion* of a soul in quest of light, but the *marriage* of Christ and the Church. And in this way human love itself has been transformed. Whereas, according to the doctrines of mystical paganism, human love was sublimated so thoroughly as to be made into a god even while it was being dedicated to death, Christianity has restored human love to its proper status, and in this status has hallowed it by means of marriage. Such a love, being understood according to the image of Christ's love for His Church (Ephesians, v. 25), is able to be truly mutual. For its object, from having been the actual notion of love and the exquisite and fatal branding of love ('It is better', Saint Paul says, 'to marry than to burn'), has become the other *as he or she really is*. And, in spite of the hindrances of sin, human love is a happy love, since already here below it can by obedience attain to the fullness of its own status.

When pursued to its logical extreme, the dualism of Night and Day had resulted, *from the standpoint of life*, in the ultimate misfortune—death. Christianity is a fatal misfortune only for the man who is parted from God, but it is a newly creative and blessed misfortune *already in this life* for the believer who 'takes the cup of salvation'.

## IV

## EAST AND WEST

It is the duty of a writer who refers to East and West in any but a geographical sense to define his terms. By 'East' I mean in this book an attitude of the human mind which has reached its highest and purest expression in the general

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vicinity of Asia; this mystical attitude is dualistic as regards the world and monistic as regards fulfilment. 'Eastern' *askesis* is directed to negation of the Many and to absorption into the One; it looks to a *complete fusion* with a god, or, lacking a god (as in the case of Buddhism), with the universal One of Being. By 'West' I mean a religious attitude which actually reached us from the Near East, but has been supreme solely in the West. According to this attitude, God and man are divided by a fundamental abyss—or, as Kierkegaard calls it, 'an infinite qualitative difference'. This attitude accordingly does not look to any absorption or union in substance; but only to a communion, the model of which is the *marriage* of the Church and her Lord. No doubt the 'Western' attitude has often been found in the East, and *vice versa*. But that is immaterial.

Now, Eros, it will be recalled, requires union—that is, the complete absorption of the essence of individuals into the god. The existence of distinct individuals is considered to be due to a grievous error, and their part is to rise progressively till they are dissolved in the divine perfection. Let not a man attach himself to his fellow-creatures, for they are devoid of all excellence, and in so far as they are particular individuals they merely represent so many deficiencies of Being. There is no such thing as our neighbour. And the intensification of love must be at the same time a lover's *askesis*, whereby he will eventually escape out of life.

Agape, on the contrary, is not directed to a union that can only occur after life is over. 'God is in heaven, and thou art on earth.' And thy fate is being decided here below. Sin consists not in having been born, but in having lost God by becoming independent. And God is not to be found again by means of a limitless *elevation* of desire. However much our eros may be sublimated, it can never cease to be self. Orthodox Christianity allows no room either to illusion or to human optimism. But that does not mean it condemns us to despair.

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For we have had the Good Tidings—the tidings that God is seeking us. And He finds us whenever we hearken to His voice, and answer by obeying Him. God seeks us, and He has found us, thanks to His Son Who came *down* to us. The Incarnation is the historic sign of a renewed creation, wherein a believer is reinstated thanks to his very act of faith. Thereupon, forgiven and hallowed—that is to say, reconciled—he is still a man—there has been no divinization—but he no longer lives for himself alone. ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and thy neighbour as thyself.’ It is in loving his neighbour that a Christian is fulfilled and truly loves himself.

*Agape* brings no fusion or ecstatic dissolving of the self in God. The divine love is the *beginning* of a new life, a life created by the act of communion. And for a real communion there are certainly required two participants, each present to the other. It is thus that each is the other’s neighbour. And since *agape* is alone in recognizing the existence of our neighbour—*Eros* failing to do so—and is the love of this neighbour, not as an excuse for self-exaltation, but as an acceptance of him or her, in the whole concrete reality of his or her affliction and hope, it seems legitimate to infer that the kind of love called *passion* must have arisen as a rule among peoples who adored Eros, and that, on the contrary, Christian peoples—historically speaking, the inhabitants of the Western Continent of Europe—must have remained strangers to passion, or at least must have found it incredible. But History compels us to acknowledge that exactly the opposite has happened.

In the East,<sup>1</sup> and also in the Greece of Plato, human love has usually been regarded as mere pleasure and physical enjoyment. Not only has passion—in the tragic and painful sense of the word—seldom been met with there, but also

<sup>1</sup> And by ‘the East’ I do not mean Persia, Islam, Arabia, or Judaism, which are directly connected with Western religious cycles; but India, China, Tibet, Japan, and so on.

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and especially it has been despised in the eyes of current morals and treated as a sickness or frenzy. In the West, on the contrary, it was marriage which in the twelfth century became an object of contempt, and passion that was glorified precisely because it is preposterous, causes its victims to suffer, and wreaks havoc alike in the world and in the self.

As a result of identifying the religious components whose presence we had detected in the myth, we find ourselves confronted by a flagrant contradiction between doctrine and manners. Perhaps it is this very contradiction that can account for the myth.

## V

### HOW EUROPEAN MANNERS HAVE RESPONDED TO CHRISTIANITY

I offer the following scheme for the sake of clearness.

	<i>Doctrine</i>	<i>Theoretical Application</i>	<i>Historical Fulfilment</i>
Paganism	Mystical union (Blissful divine love)	Woeful human love	Hedonism; passion rare and despised
Christianity	Communion (but no union of essence)	Love of our Neighbour (Blissful marriage)	Painful clashes, Intense passion.

Psychologically, the paradoxes of this scheme are pretty easily accounted for. Neither during Plato's own lifetime nor in the course of the ensuing few centuries did Platonism become popular; it remained an esoteric wisdom. Esoteric likewise to some extent were the Celtic mysteries,

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and the Manichæan entirely so. However, when Christianity triumphed—under Constantine and under the Carolingian emperors—its doctrine was adopted by princes and ruling caste, who forced it upon the people all over the West. This of course meant the repression of the old pagan beliefs, which became the hope and refuge of natural inclinations frowned upon but not disposed of by the new rule. In the eyes of the Ancients, marriage, for example, was a utilitarian institution of limited purpose. Both adultery and concubinage were allowed by custom, for slaves could be both used and abused.<sup>1</sup> But Christian marriage, inasmuch as it is a sacrament, imposed on the natural man a constancy which he found unbearable. Any one compulsorily converted came under the restraints of the Christian code, but lacked the support of any actual faith. Inevitably the barbarian blood of such people must have rebelled, and they were all disposed to welcome a revival of the pagan mysteries in Catholic guise, since this brought a promise of 'emancipation'. Hence it was that the secret doctrines of which we have been investigating the antecedents gained no real hold on the West till the day they came under the ban of official Christianity. Then, and only then, did passionate love—a terrestrial form of the cult of Eros—invade the psyche of those members of the leading caste who had only simulated conversion and felt the marriage rule as a restriction. Yet devotion to a god who was anathema to the Church could not be avowed in the light of day. Hence it took esoteric forms and flourished in the guise of secret heresies more or less orthodox in appearance. At the beginning of the twelfth century these heresies spread quickly. On the one hand, they wormed their way among the clergy, and a little later were manifested in many subtle and complicated ways in the great mystical revival. On the other hand, they drew a ready response out of the

<sup>1</sup> In Roman law, slaves were not persons: *Persona est sui iuris; servus non est persona.*



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depths of the spirit of the age. They were able to penetrate the feudal world, which was not invariably aware of the source and mystic significance of a set of values it treated as fashionable and which it adapted to the purposes of its own amusement. Before long a religion that rejected the Incarnation as something too materialistic had itself taken on a materialist tinge!

It has been typical of the West as regards religion to keep the letter while betraying the spirit. Here is one instance. Plato linked Love and Beauty, although what he called Beauty was above all the intellectual essence of uncreated perfection—the form of all excellence. According to José Ortega y Gasset,<sup>1</sup> ‘it is impossible to tell to what deep levels of the Western mind Platonic notions have penetrated. The simplest sort of person regularly employs expressions and betrays views which are derived from Plato.’ But such a person distorts these expressions and views in a direction suited to his Western nature; and it is in this way that Platonism has led us into a grievous error—the error of supposing that love is first and foremost a matter of *physical* beauty, when, actually, this beauty is but an attribute bestowed by a lover on the chosen object of his love. That love makes those in love better-looking in one another’s eyes is a matter of everyday experience; and so is the fact that to have a recognized type of beauty is no assurance of being loved. But, obsessed by a degenerate Platonism, we are blind to the actual looks of those we love, and are even ready to dislike them; instead we prefer to go in pursuit of our own fancies. If this mistake seems irremediable, however, it is because it awakens obscure responses in every human being’s heart, and in particular in the heart of every European. We have seen that as far back as the Celts, the druidical cult turned Woman into a prophetic being, ‘the eternal feminine’ and ‘man’s goal’; in this way it sought to materialize the divine urge and to

<sup>1</sup> *Über der Liebe* (Berlin, 1933).

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endow it with a corporeal hypostasis. Moreover, Freud has now made us all aware that a man's 'type of woman', that image which he bears graven on his heart and turns into a definition of feminine beauty, is but a 'mother fixation' haunting the recesses of his memory.

Assuming that we have now distinguished the causes of the curious contradiction between teaching and manners that grows visible in the twelfth century, it becomes possible to formulate a preliminary inference. *The cultivation of passionate love began in Europe as a reaction to Christianity (and in particular to its doctrine of marriage) by people whose spirit, whether naturally or by inheritance, was still pagan.*

But this would be mere theory and highly disputable were it not that how Eros came to be re-born is well known to history and can be described with precision. We have already settled on a date. The earliest passionate lovers whose story has reached us are Abélard and Héloïse, who lived in the first half of the twelfth century; and it is in the middle of this same century that love was first recognized and encouraged as a passion worth cultivating. Passionate love was then given a name which has since become familiar. It was called *cortezia*, or courtly love.

## VI

### COURTLY LOVE: TROUBADOURS AND CATHARS

That all European poetry has come out of the Provençal poetry written in the twelfth century by the troubadours of Languedoc is now accepted on every side. This poetry magnified unhappy love. M. Charles Albert Cingria remarked recently:<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Mesures*, No. 2 (Paris, 1937).

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'The whole of the Occitanian, Petrarchian, and Dantesque lyric has but a single theme—love; and not happy, crowned, and satisfied love (the sight of which yields nothing), but on the contrary love perpetually unsatisfied—and but two characters: a poet reiterating his plaint eight hundred, nine hundred, a thousand times; and a fair lady who ever says "No".'

No European poetry has been more profoundly *rbetorical*, not only in its verbal and musical forms, but also—paradoxical as it may seem—in its actual inspiration, which it obtained exclusively from the rules of courtly love, the *leys d'amor*. But it is likewise true that no rhetoric has been more productive of high-flown fervour. What it quickens with noble emotion is love outside marriage; for marriage implies no more than a physical union, but 'Amor'—the supreme Eros—is the soul's transport upwards to eventual union with light, something far beyond any love attainable in this life. That is why Love now implies chastity. 'E d'amor mou castitaz', sang the Toulouse troubadour, Guilhem Montanhagol. 'Out of love comes chastity.' Love further implies a ritual—the ritual of *domnei* or *donnoi*, love's vassalage. It is by the beauty of his musical homage that a poet wins his *lady*. On his knee he swears eternal constancy to her, as knights swore fealty to their suzerain.

'In token of love, a lady gave her poet-paladin a golden ring, bade him rise, and then imprinted a kiss on his brow. This first kiss was usually the only one, and was called *consolament*. A number of Provençal priests went so far as to lend their blessing to these mystic unions by placing them under the invocation of the Virgin.'<sup>1</sup>

Whence came this notion of a love 'perpetually unsatisfied' and whence too that of singing with plaintive enthu-

<sup>1</sup> Otto Rahn, *Der Kreuzzug gegen den Gral* (1927). He is probably alluding to the case of the troubadour Pierre de Barjac. Such abuses were rare, for reasons which will be apparent shortly.

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siasm the praises of 'a fair lady who ever says "No" '? And how is it that such consummate poesy was at hand ready to serve the new passion? The miraculous character of the twin birth cannot be too greatly stressed. Within no more than about twenty years there were established together, on the one hand a vision of woman entirely at variance with traditional manners—woman was set *above man*, and became his nostalgic ideal—and on the other hand a new but fully developed poetry of an extremely complex and refined character—a poetry equally unknown to Antiquity and to the few centuries of literary vigour that had followed the Carolingian Renaissance. Either both these things 'dropped out of the sky'—that is to say, medieval society was suddenly and collectively inspired with them—or else they had some definite historical cause. On the first assumption, we must ask why the inspiration came at that particular time and in that particular area; and on the second assumption, why the historical cause should have remained a mystery ever since. The most curious feature of the business is that whenever the most serious authorities happen to refer to it they betray they are at a loss and at once determine to say nothing.

It is generally recognized to-day that both Provençal poetry and the notion of love which informs its themes, far from being accounted for by conditions prevailing at the time, seem to have been in flat contradiction to them. 'Evidently', according to M. Jeanroy,<sup>1</sup> 'the poetry did not reflect the actual state of affairs, for the position allotted to women in feudal institutions of the South was quite as lowly and dependent as in those of the North.' If it is thus 'evident' that the troubadours were not depicting the conditions around them, they must have obtained their notion of love from *elsewhere*. The same must be true, for that

<sup>1</sup> A. Jeanroy, Introduction to *Anthologie des Troubadours* (Paris, 1927).

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matter, of their art, their poetic technique. Admittedly, in this they were extremely original. Yet whenever some historian ventures on a theory of how courtly rhetoric came into being, the authorities turn on him with biting irony. Sismondi attributed the origins of emotional mysticism to the Arabs: his theory was disdainfully rejected as monstrous. Diez discerned resemblances in the rhythms and pauses of Arab and Provençal lyric poetry: we are told he must not be taken seriously. Brinkmann and others suggested that Latin poetry of the eleventh and twelfth centuries may have provided models: but this, it is said, cannot be listened to, because the troubadours, it seems, were not sufficiently educated to have been aware of this poetry. Thus, no matter what explanation is offered, the authorities are apparently determined to pooh-pooh any attempt to give a meaning to what they have devoted their lives to studying. It is true that Wechssler, in a famous book,<sup>1</sup> supposed everything was going to be cleared up when he announced that he had found underlying Provençal poetry certain *religious* influences, of a neo-Platonist and debased Christian nature. But he was at once stigmatized 'a doctinaire'—the most damaging of insults—and several Frenchmen implied that as he was both a professor and a German he was hardly fitted to form an opinion on a matter connected with the limpid and elegant genius of the French.

In these circumstances it is perhaps bold of me to reopen the subject. Nevertheless, following two eminent Frenchmen—E. Aroux (1854) and Péladan (1906)—I wonder if the clue to the rise of this poetry is not to be sought nearer at hand than any one has so far looked for it—much nearer, on the spot, and in the environment of the poets. I do not mean the purely 'social' environment in the modern sense, but in the religious atmosphere which happened to deter-

<sup>1</sup> E. Wechssler, *Das Kulturproblem des Minnesangs* (Halle, 1909).

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mine the formal behaviour—including the social usages—of that environment.<sup>1</sup> One great historical event stands out in the Provençal twelfth century. Simultaneously with the rise of the poetry of *domnei* and in the same provinces and among the same classes there also arose a great heresy. Historians have declared that the Catharist religion was as powerful a menace to the Church as Arianism had been earlier. It has even been asserted that, notwithstanding the bloody Albigensian crusade, or on account of it, this religion won millions of secret converts in Europe during the thirteenth century and afterwards up to the Reformation.

According to Rahn, it can be stated confidently that Catharism arose directly out of the heresy of the Priscillianists, a sect which settled in the southern Pyrenees in the fourth century and converted the local druids to Christianity. Other writers connect the birth of the movement with the Paulicians and with the Neo-Manichaean churches of Asia Minor and Bulgaria. However that may be, the 'Pure' or Cathars—they take their name from the Greek word for 'pure'—are related to the broad Gnostic streams that flow through the first Christian millenary; and I do not need to recall that, like the doctrine of Manes, the Gnosis was rooted in the dualistic Iranian religion.<sup>2</sup> As for their doctrine, although the Inquisition burned most of the

<sup>1</sup> It has sometimes been attempted to explain *cortezia* sociologically. The procedure is to elaborate often contradictory theories regarding the status of women in Languedoc. Vernon Lee, for example, noted in *Medieval Love* that there were far more men than women in the castles of the feudal chieftains, and that few of the men could find wives. She therefore went on to imagine that men must have idealized the object of a desire so hard to gratify. The information about the preponderance of men is interesting, but it really does nothing to explain courtly rhetoric.

<sup>2</sup> Among Gnostic sects influenced by Parsee dualism may be mentioned that of Bardesanes, the Peratians, the Docetae, the Cainites, the Sethians, and that of Simon Magus.

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writings,<sup>1</sup> its records preserve the text of the questions to which the accused were subjected.<sup>2</sup> With the help of what we already know of Manichaeism and of the methods of the Inquisition, we are in a position to reconstruct in bold outline the creed of 'the Church of Love'.

God is love. But the world is evil. Therefore God cannot be the author of the world, of its darkness, or of the sin by which we are hemmed in. A first creation of the world was being carried out by God when while still unfinished it was interrupted by the rebel Angel—Satan or the Demiurge<sup>3</sup>—who then completed it. Man is a fallen angel, imprisoned in matter, and on that account subject to the laws of the body—in particular the most oppressive of these, the law of procreation. But the Son of God came to show the way back to the Light. The Christ was not incarnated; he but put on the appearance of a man.<sup>4</sup> In this way the Cathars were brought to reject the dogma of the

<sup>1</sup> But not all. D. Roché, in an excellent study, *Le Catharisme* (Carcassonne, 1937), p. 2, gives a list of works which have been retrieved. Among them are an initiation ritual, an apocrypha of Saint John—more accurately called 'The Secret Eucharist'—and the *Capitula* of Faustus of Milev, a Manichaean bishop who exerted a direct influence on the Cathars. To these may be added *Saint Paul's Vision* and *Saint Patrick's Purgatory* (translated by Maria of France) and several writings which have recently been published in Bulgaria (*Bogomile Apocryphae*). [A ritual in Provençal is preserved in a thirteenth-century MS. at Lyons. —Translator.]

<sup>2</sup> Vide especially *Summae contra Kataros* by Alain of Lille (Alanus de Insulis), Moneta of Cremona, Ranieri Sacconi, and Bernard Gui's *Manuel de l'Inquisiteur*.

<sup>3</sup> The dualism here is resolved into an eschatological monism, inasmuch as at the end of time Satan and matter, it is held, will be illuminated, whereas, according to orthodoxy, Satan is for ever damned. It remains that Manichaeism condemns life *in time* whereas the Christian is bidden to return to this life and strives to have 'the earnest expectation of the creature'.

<sup>4</sup> Hence the name of 'Docetae' assumed by one Gnostic sect, *ἐόκηταις* being Greek for 'apparition'.

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Incarnation, and consequently the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in which the Incarnation is expressed. For this last they substituted a mere commemorative communal meal. Their interpretation of the Gospels, and especially of the Gospel according to Saint John, is altogether 'spiritual'. Theirs was a triple heresy. It divides the Father by distinguishing between God and Jehovah; it minimizes the Second Person by dismissing the Cross and the *one* sufficient redemption; and it exaggerates and distorts the Third Person by turning the Paraclete into 'the Mother of God'—the feminine source of Love.<sup>1</sup> The Church of Love, the Catharist Santa Gleyzia, recognized but one 'sacrament'—baptism by the consolatory Holy Ghost, the kiss of peace or *consolamentum* bestowed by the priest on the new brother in the initiation ceremony of a 'perfect'. And this is less a sacrament in the Catholic sense of the word than a sign of accession to spiritual life. Before receiving this kiss, the neophyte was required solemnly to undertake that he would devote himself to God and His Gospel, that he would never lie nor swear, that he would *avoid touching his wife if he were married*,<sup>2</sup> that he would neither kill an animal nor feed on animal flesh, and lastly that he would keep his faith secret. A forty days' fast, or *endura*, preceded initiation, and another of the same length followed it.

'It often happened [Rahn says] that Cathars, after receiving the *consolamentum* and during the [second] *endura*, killed themselves voluntarily. Their doctrine, like that of the druids, allowed suicide. But it required that if life were forsaken, it should be not out of weariness of living, out of

<sup>1</sup> Some analogies seem feasible between the *Sophia* of the Greek Gnostics and the Catharist *Maria*.

<sup>2</sup> D. Roché (op. cit., pp. 14–15) tones down this condemnation of marriage in the *unalloyed* Catharist doctrine by recalling the statement in Matthew that some 'have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake'. And, after all, Rome had set its seal on convents!



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fear, or to avoid pain, but in a state of complete detachment from matter. . . . Five kinds of self-inflicted death were favoured. Poison, succumbing to hunger, opening the veins of the wrist, jumping over a precipice, or else, after a very hot bath, lying down in winter on a cold stone floor in order to get congestion of the lungs—in their case an illness invariably fatal. The most skilled doctor is unable to save a patient bent on dying.’<sup>1</sup>

One more feature is not the least important. As with so many Eastern religions and sects—Jainists, Buddhists, Essenes, and Gnostic Christians—the Catharist Church was composed of two groups—the *perfecti* and the mere believers (*credentes* or *imperfecti*). The latter alone were allowed to marry and to go on living in a world which the Pure condemned, and this even though they did not comply with all the precepts of the esoteric morality—bodily mortification, contempt for creation, and the severing of ‘worldly ties’.

Saint Bernard of Clairvaux fought the Cathars with all his might, and yet (as quoted by Rahn) he allows that ‘no sermons are more Christian than theirs, and their morals are pure’. His stating this makes up in part for the slanders of the Inquisition. But it is nevertheless odd of a saint to describe as ‘Christian’ a preaching which rejected several of the fundamental dogmas of the Church; and as for the morals of the Cathars, it has just been shown that they professed beliefs entirely contrary to those upon which true Christian morality is based. *The condemnation of the flesh, which some people nowadays suppose to be characteristically Christian, is of Manichaean and heretical origin.* For it must be borne in mind that when Saint Paul speaks of the ‘flesh’,

<sup>1</sup> It is only fair to point out that D. Roché (op. cit.) considers that the Catharist belief in reincarnation must have precluded any commendation of suicide. I do not see, however, why this belief should not have *favoured* a self-inflicted death at the end of an appropriate period of initiation

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he does not mean the physical body, but the *whole* unbelieving man—body, mind, faculties, and desires.

The Albigensian crusade was led by the Abbot of Citeaux at the beginning of the thirteenth century. It resulted in the destruction of the towns inhabited by Cathars, in the burning of their books, the slaughter and burning of the people, and the violation of the sanctuary of Montségur.<sup>1</sup> A civilization that had grown up in less than a century was brutally devastated. Yet, far more than is realized—as I hope to show—to this culture and to these secret doctrines we are still paying tribute.

## VII

## HERESY AND POETRY

I feel I am now entitled to suggest that the troubadours were 'believers' of the Catharist Church and the bards of its heresy. So strong are the presumptions in favour of this view that I do not see what there is to account for the sudden lyric impulse of the troubadours if we refuse to allow that it sprang out of the Catharist heresy.

Otto Rahn has gone so far as to say: 'Most troubadours were heretics; every Cathar was a troubadour.' But we are on sufficiently solid ground to be able to dispense with enthusiastic exaggeration. Like the Cathars, the troubadours glorified a love 'perpetually unsatisfied' and extolled—without however practising—the virtue of chastity. Is this a pure coincidence? A troubadour received from his Lady no more than a single kiss of initiation. Troubadours distinguished two stages in the *domnei*—the *pregaire* or

<sup>1</sup> Rahn contends that this was the Mount Salvat of the Grail legend.

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prayer, and the *entendeire*—as the Church of Love distinguished between adepts and perfects. Troubadours scoffed at the marriage bond. They reviled the clergy, and also those allies of the clergy, the members of the feudal system. They liked best to lead the wandering lives of the Pure, who went off along the road in pairs. The castles where they paused to sing and to offer homage were precisely the castles of heretical lords. There is no end to facts of this kind. Are they all pure coincidences?

Let us see what is to be said on the other side. Not all the troubadours, I shall be told, were heretics. A number ended their days in convents. No doubt, and moreover Folquet of Marseilles turns out to have taken part in the Albigenian crusade. But for that very reason he was considered a traitor and eventually brought before Pope Innocent III on a charge of having been responsible for the death of five hundred thousand people! As far as that goes, even if it could be shown that certain troubadours in particular never suspected the existence of a close connexion between their themes and the doctrine of the Cathars, we should still be entitled to attribute to these themes a Catharist *origin*. The troubadours, it should be borne in mind, displayed an admirable unanimity in composing their *coblas* and *sirventés*. They all obeyed the same rhetorical canons, which they learned in company of a wintertime at schools called 'menestrandises'.<sup>1</sup> It is easy enough for poetry—and possibly very fine poetry—to be written on themes which the poet finds already current around him, and he need not trouble his head about how they have appeared. Beauty apart, is this not indeed usual? And if it is objected that in all the poems that have come down to us the troubadours never refer to holding peculiar religious beliefs, the obvious answer is that Cathars were compelled to promise, at the moment of initiation, never to disclose

<sup>1</sup> As C. A. Cingria says, 'the musical academies of the period'.

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the nature of their faith, and that they looked upon this promise as binding even in the face of death. Thus the records of the Inquisition contain not a single statement on the subject of the *minesola*,<sup>1</sup> the ceremony in which 'perfecti' reached final initiation. We should also take into account how often courts of love discussed the question: 'Can a married knight be true to his lady?' For numbers of troubadours must have gone through a simulated marriage with the Church of Rome—they were clerics—while serving in their 'thoughts' another Lady—the Church of Love.<sup>2</sup> It may be objected that some of the troubadours abjured heresy without giving up the *trobar*. Quite true, but so may a convert to Roman Catholicism to-day refer in his poems to the Virgin Mary by means of images which he had previously invented in order to refer to others. But Peire of Auvergne did penance? That is only an added proof that he was a heretic!

That the troubadours were in possession of an esoteric doctrine is no longer disputed; and the esoterism *must* lead us astray. Jeanroy says:<sup>3</sup> 'By the beginning of the twelfth century there had arisen—and its appearance at such a time is singularly odd—a school, that of the *trobar clus*, which aimed at veiling its matter in ambiguous language.' But perhaps after all the 'prudence' thus displayed was not so very odd, considering that at this very time the Church was getting ready a crusade and an Inquisition. But let us turn to the textual evidence, which is available in the sheer transparency of its adamant rhetoric.

Aimeric de Belenoi takes the theme that *death* is to be preferred to earthly rewards.

<sup>1</sup> Or *manisola*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Gui, *Manuel de l'Inquisiteur*, which shows that although the Cathars venerated the Blessed Virgin, she was not, according to them, a woman of flesh and blood, the Mother of Jesus, but their Church.

<sup>3</sup> A. Jeanroy, *La Poésie lyrique des troubadours*, I, p. 69.

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Far more it pleaseth me to die  
'Than easy mean delight to feel.  
For what will meanly satisfy  
Nor can nor ought to fire my zeal.

'What will meanly satisfy' would rid him of his desire were it not that the ill he cherishes is love without end, *joy d'amor*, the frenzy that prevails over all else.

. . . in fact this wild desire  
Is bound to be my death, no matter if I stay or go.  
For she who could deliver me, no pity will she show.  
. . . and this desire  
Although it hath from frenzy sprung, it certainly prevails  
Above the others all.

If he does not wish to die yet, it is because he feels that he has not yet become detached from desire, and feels that he would be leaving his body out of despair—a 'mortal sin'; it is, further, that he is still unaware

how this may be his weal  
That ecstasy his soul shall softly steal.

Did not the Catharist doctrine require that life should be ended, 'not out of weariness nor out of fear or pain, but in a state of utter detachment from nature'?<sup>1</sup>

Here, next, is the theme of *separation*, the leitmotiv of all courtly love:

Heaven! How doth it thus befall  
The farther off I am the more I long for her.

Then there is Guiraut de Bornheil, who prays to the *true* Light<sup>2</sup> as he waits for the dawn of terrestrial day—the dawn that is going to reunite him with his 'copain' (or

<sup>1</sup> D. Roché, op. cit.

<sup>2</sup> A troubadour's use of the word 'true' before God, Light, Faith, or Church is probably the sign that he was a Cathar. The Cathars took care to speak the language of orthodoxy, in which, however, they inserted this slight qualification.

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comrade) of the road—and hence of his trials in the world. We may wonder whether the two ‘copains’ are not mind and body, and we may also bear in mind that missionaries go forth in pairs.

O high and glorious King, O Light and Brightness true!  
O God of Power, Lord, suppose it pleases you,  
Make my comrade welcome, and grant him all your aid.  
For him I have not seen since fell the night’s dark shade,  
And soon will come the dawn.

But by the time the troubadour reaches the end of his lay,  
has he betrayed his vows, or has he found in the bosom of  
night that true Light from which there must be no parting?

Noble comrade mine, so happy am I where I stay,  
I never wish again to see the rise of dawn or day.  
The loveliest of maidens that a mother could e’er bear  
I now hold closely in my arms, so I no longer care  
What happens to the envious or the dawn.

This nightingale was cheerfully giving throat to the trill  
that later on supplied Wagner with Brengain’s sublime cry:

Habet acht! Habet acht!  
Schon weicht dem Tag die Nacht!<sup>1</sup>

But in no poem is it clear whether the ‘fair lady who  
ever says “No!”’ is a woman or a symbol. The trouba-

<sup>1</sup> ‘Dawns’ were a recognized kind of poem. It can readily be  
understood how appropriate they were to the purposes of a vision  
of the world which was dominated by the hostility of Day and  
Night. Here is the beginning of another anonymous ‘Dawn’:

‘In a garden, in a hawthorn nook, the lady has held her lover in  
her arms till the watchman cried: “God! It’s the dawn! How  
quickly it comes!”’

In Wagner’s *Tristan* the invisible watcher is Brengain, who  
cries from the balcony:

Have a care! Have a care!  
Now night gives way to day!

But Tristan does not fail to answer:

Ever hold us, O night!

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dours all swear that they will in no circumstances betray the *secret* of their mighty passion, exactly as though it was a faith, and one imparted to them by initiation. 'I know not how to make known my flame, for fear that something will transpire', one says. And another apostrophizes real or imaginary enemies as follows:

'Cease, I tell you, in the name of Love and in my own name, treacherous accusers, steeped in every kind of malice, cease asking who is she, and which her country, whether near or far. This I shall keep well hidden from you. I would rather perish than fail by so much as a word.' No 'lady' could be worthy of such a sacrifice. Then there is William of Poitiers's cry:

By her alone shall I be saved!

If these are only rhetorical tropes, we have to ask ourselves what state of mind produced them, and what kind of Love can have been their Platonic idea or form? In the song, 'Du moindre tiers d'Amour'—the love of women—Guiraut of Calanson says of the other loves—the love of parents and heavenly love—

'To the second is suited nobility and thanks; and the first is so lofty that its powers hover above the sky.'

This one-in-three love, this feminine principle ('amor' in Provençal is of the feminine gender), which Dante presently found 'moving the sky and all the stars', seems indeed to be the Divinity-in-itself of the great heterodox mystics, the God of before the Trinity mentioned both in the Gnosis and by Master Eckhart. Nothing else could produce that uncertainty, that sense of equivocation, which it is impossible to throw off as we read the love poems of the troubadours. The poems are always about a real woman.<sup>1</sup> But so is the Song of Songs, and there too the tone is truly mystical.

<sup>1</sup> Usually given a symbolical name or *senbal*. The Sufi mystics also refer to God in their poems under a symbolical name.

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I come to a song by Peire de Rogiers.

Bitter, bitter my distress must be,  
And never, never must my heart give up  
Its great and overwhelming grief for her,  
Nor I be granted e'en a passing hope  
Of joy however sweet however good.  
Great joy could acts of prowess bring to me.  
I'll do none; all I know to want is SHE.

And here is Bernart de Ventadour:

'She has taken my heart, she has taken my self, she has taken from me the world, and then she has eluded me, leaving me with only my desire and my parched heart.'

And next two verses by Arnaut Daniel—a nobleman who turned wandering jongleur and whose poems, according to authorities on the Romance languages, are 'devoid of thought'—seem to me to display the unmistakable demeanour of negative mysticism hovering over its strictly unvaried metaphors.

'I love and seek her so eagerly that I believe the very violence of my desire of her would deprive me of all desire whatsoever could one lose aught by loving well. For her heart drowns mine in a never-diminishing flood. . . .

'I want neither the Roman empire nor to be named its pope [and for a very good reason!], if I am not to be brought back to her for whom my heart is ablaze and cleft in twain. But if she has not solaced my anguish with a kiss [*consolamentum*] before the New Year, she will destroy me and I shall be damned.'

At the end of the poem a touch of Southern petulance screens the grave import of what he is doing—namely, setting up two Churches in opposition to one another.

'I am Arnaut who piles up the wind, who courses hares with a bullock; I swim against the tide!'

It will be recalled that when Arnaut Daniel appears in the



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*Purgatorio*, he utters his name to Dante, his disciple, in a verse of purest Provençal:

Ieu sui Arnaut, que plor e vau cantan. . . .

The Church of Rome was under no misapprehension regarding the nature of that which our all too authoritative authorities to-day persist in refusing to see. It correctly gauged the magnitude of the peril contained in Heresy. There was the notorious crusade, and also the Dominican Inquisition. The extreme and violent tactics employed could not ensure the pulling up of all the roots of the revolt, sinister and innocent alike. But with eminent wisdom the clergy thereupon sought to satisfy by 'orthodox' means the human craving that had produced the symbolical cult of Woman. From the middle of the twelfth century onwards there was a succession of attempts to promote a cult of the Virgin. It was sought to substitute 'Our Lady' for the 'Lady of Thoughts' of the heretics. At Lyons in 1140 the canons instituted a Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady. And the monastic orders which sprang up at this time were replicas of the orders of knighthood.<sup>1</sup> It was all very well for Saint Bernard of Clairvaux to protest in a famous letter against 'this new feast unknown to the custom of the Church, disapproved of by reason, and without sanction from tradition . . . a feast which introduces novelty—the sister of superstition and the daughter of fickleness'; and it was all very well for Saint Thomas, a century later, to declare in the clearest terms that 'if Mary had been conceived without sin, she would not have required redemption by Jesus Christ'—the cult of the Virgin filled what the Church felt, in face of the danger threatening it, to be a vital necessity. Several centuries later the Papacy could do no more than sanction the recognition of a sentiment which had not waited on dogma in order to triumph throughout the arts.

<sup>1</sup> Monks were 'Knights of Mary'.

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### VIII

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THE conclusions to which the two preceding sections have led are likely to raise a number of objections, and some of these, which I foresee, I shall deal with at once.

No doubt we still have much to learn regarding the religious rites and beliefs of the Cathars. But what little is known about them is enough to establish the Manichaean sources of the heresy beyond dispute. And, as I have pointed out *supra*,<sup>1</sup> Manichaean dogmas are *in essence lyrical*, so that any additional information regarding changes to which the dogmas were subjected in the Church of Languedoc or Southern France, or regarding distinctions drawn about them, could weigh little either for or against what I contend. It would be idle to seek in courtly rhetoric for any strict and rational correspondences with the dogmas. All we are likely to find is a lyrical and psalmodic treatment of the fundamental symbols. To explain this by means of a recent example, the 'Christian sentiments' that are found in Baudelaire are not a one-one transposition of Roman Catholic dogmas, but rather the expression of a certain sensibility—one possibly having its own particular form—that would be impossible but for the existence of the dogmas; moreover, on top of the sensibility, there are strains of vocabulary and syntax of clearly liturgical origin. I am entitled to submit that the favourite themes of the Provençal poets stand in an analogous relation to Neo-Manichaeism.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Book II, §2.

<sup>2</sup> Since writing the above I have read a remarkable study by Lucie Varga, 'Peire Cardinal était-il hérétique?' in *Revue d'histoire des religions*, June 1938. The writer goes so far as to suggest that the troubadour poems should be taken as *sources* for the study of Catharism.

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In addition, the heretical origin of the themes of courtly rhetoric becomes unmistakable as soon as these themes are compared with those used in the 'orthodox' poetry of the period. An authority as sceptical as Jeanroy has not failed to notice this. Speaking of the abstract character of the lyrical inspiration of thirteenth-century troubadours, and of the confusion between God and the Lady of Thoughts which this inspiration fosters, he writes:<sup>1</sup>

'It may be said that these are but rhetorical figures of no consequence. Very good. But it remains that the theories which the troubadours developed with such earnest intent are at the antipodes of Christianity. Is it possible that the troubadours themselves can have been unaware of this? And thereupon the question arises why their poetry bears no trace of the internal discord or *dissidio* that renders some of Petrarch's lines so pathetic.'

I have already referred to the objection that the troubadours never admitted being Cathars. There were of course imperative reasons for silence on their part, among them the oath of initiation and the fear of persecution.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, it is not necessary that they should have been actual believers. If, however, courtly *symbolism* will account for certain misunderstandings or abuses on the part of the troubadours, it indicates far more misunderstanding on ours. If we try to place ourselves in the medieval atmosphere, it becomes clear that the absence of any symbolical meaning in a poem would have been something far more offensive than it can be now. To a medieval man every thing meant some other thing, and this without any translation into concepts on his part. That is to say, he had no need to formulate the meaning of the symbols he used in order to become fully conscious of them. He was impervious to the rationalism which causes people to-day to abstract and empty of all significant overtones the objects

<sup>1</sup> *Poésie lyrique des troubadours*, op. cit., II, p. 306.

<sup>2</sup> Those who did speak of the faith had abjured it.

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to which they attend.<sup>1</sup> One of the best historians of medieval manners, Huizinga, provides a pertinent instance of this in the behaviour of Suso the mystic.<sup>2</sup>

‘Towards the end of the Middle Ages two factors dominate religious life: the extreme saturation of the religious atmosphere, and a marked tendency of thought to embody itself in images.

•  
‘Individual and social life, in all their manifestations, are imbued with the conceptions of faith. There is not an object or an action, however trivial, that is not constantly correlated with Christ or salvation. All thinking tends to religious interpretation of individual things; there is an enormous unfolding of religion in daily life. This spiritual wakefulness, however, results in a dangerous state of tension, for the presupposed transcendental feelings are sometimes dormant, and whenever this is the case, all that is meant to stimulate spiritual consciousness is reduced to appalling commonplace profanity, to a startling worldliness in other-worldly guise. . . .

‘Even in the case of a sublime mystic like Henry Suso, the craving for hallowing every action of daily life verges in our eyes on the ridiculous. He is sublime when, following the usages of profane love, he celebrates New Year’s Day and May Day by offering a wreath and a song to his betrothed, Eternal Wisdom, or when, out of reverence for the Holy Virgin, he renders homage to all womankind and walks in the mud to let a beggar-woman pass. But what are we to think of what follows? At table Suso eats three-quarters of an apple in the name of the Trinity and the remaining quarter in commemoration of “the love with which the heavenly Mother gave her tender child Jesus an apple

<sup>1</sup> For example, in the Middle Ages a man was too ‘naïve’ to be able to devote himself to any material he deemed absurd—that is, material which lacked a religious significance and a fixed position in the scheme of values he accepted.

<sup>2</sup> *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, op. cit., pp. 136–7.

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to eat''; and for this reason he eats the last quarter with the paring, as little boys do not peel their apples. After Christmas he does not eat it, for then the infant Jesus was too young to eat apples. He drinks in five draughts because of the five wounds of the Lord, but as blood and water flowed from the side of Christ, he takes his last draught twice. This is, indeed, pushing the sanctification of life to extremes.'

Must it be held that this is a drop from symbol into allegory? Certainly, but evidently carried to excess. Huizinga remarks some pages later that the simple religious sense of the people did not need to have its faith intellectually justified; the visible image of holy things was enough to establish their reality. This shows that in the eyes of the initiated and in those of sympathizers with the Church of Love the 'secret' of the troubadours served as a *symbolical witness*. In the ordinary way it could not occur to any one that the symbols were invalid unless expounded and accounted for in non-symbolical fashion.

Nevertheless, it is easy to understand that the peculiar position of heretics caused some poets to be very discreet in indicating that, apart from the habitual symbolism which spoke for itself, their work possessed an exact double meaning. Hence symbols were sometimes vehicles of allegory as well, and took on a cryptographic guise. This happened with the school of the *trobar clus*, to which I have already referred. While on the subject of this school, Jeanroy remarks:<sup>1</sup> 'Another way [of 'baffling the reader'] was to put a sacred notion into profane dress, and to apply to divine love phrases appropriated by custom to the expression of human love.' He claims not 'to be able to unravel' the causes of this 'singular perversion of taste in a form of literature that had newly arisen'. The troubadour Alegret has, however, declared significantly:

'My verse must seem nonsense to fools who cannot

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., II, p. 16.

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understand it in two ways. . . . If some one wishes to challenge this line, let him come forward, and I shall show him how it was possible to put in two [*variant*, three] words with various meanings.'

There is no reason to suppose that the troubadours engaged in this skilful confusing of the sense (*entrebescar*, the Provençals called it, meaning 'to interweave') merely as a literary exercise for the purpose of 'puzzling their hearers with conundrums'. 'I interweave words rare, dark, and colourful, pensively pensive', Rambaut of Orange writes. And Marcabru says: 'Wise beyond doubt I hold him who divines what each word in my song means.' It is true that he adds—sally or precaution?—'Because I myself am hard put to it to light up my dark speech.'

How far a troubadour himself understood the deep purport of his symbols is something, indeed, that cannot be determined. After all, the general run of human beings are very little conscious of using metaphors.<sup>1</sup> What I quoted above about the artless way in which medieval people accepted symbolism needs to be borne in mind. Symbols were not translatable into prosaic and rational concepts. The question has therefore only to be asked concerning the *double* allegorical meaning. Furthermore, all this poetry was being produced in an atmosphere highly charged with passion. The happenings recorded in contemporary chronicles are among the wildest and most *surréaliste* in the history of European manners. A jealous lord killed his wife's favourite troubadour, and had the dead man's heart served up to her on a dish. The lady ate it without knowing what it was. Her lord having told her, 'Sir', she said, 'you have given me such a delicious dish that never shall I partake of any other'; and she threw herself out of the window of

<sup>1</sup> If some inarticulate man copies the letters he sends to his beloved out of a text-book, it does not follow that the expressions he uses do not seem to him to express his true and sincere emotion.

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the keep. In an atmosphere where such events were possible, poets, it will be agreed, can have had no difficulty in 'colouring' a symbolism originally dogmatic.

There is a very widespread notion that courtly love was but an idealization of carnal desire. In order to refute theories built on the assumption of materialism it should be enough to say that medieval symbolism usually operated from high to low—from heaven to earth. But, furthermore, it is odd of authorities to insist on the 'realism' in the poems of the troubadours and on their exact descriptions of the beloved Lady when the same authorities complain that the poets used only stereotyped epithets. Geoffrey Rudel, Prince of Blaye, states quite clearly that his Lady is a creation of his mind, and that she vanishes at dawn. Elsewhere, it is 'a far-away princess' that he says he wishes to love. In a poem on women Rambaut of Orange says that if you want to win them you should be brutal, 'punch them on the nose' (this is crude enough, surely?), and force them, because that is what they like.

'As for me [he adds], I behave differently, because I do not care about loving. I do not want to be put to trouble for the sake of women, any more than if they were all my sisters; and so with women I am humble, obliging, frank and gentle, fond, respectful, and faithful. . . I love nothing, except this ring, which is dear to me because it has been on a finger. . . . But I am going too far; stop, tongue! Because to say too much is worse than mortal sin!'

This same Rambaut of Orange, however, wrote admirable poems in praise of his Lady; and we saw earlier that a *ring* (such as Tristan and Iseult exchange) was the symbol of a constancy which happened not to be that of the body. Let me also stress the important fact that the courtly virtues of humility, frankness, respect, and fidelity to one's Lady are being expressly connected here with a rejection of physical love. Moreover, we shall see later<sup>1</sup> that in Dante

<sup>1</sup> Book IV.

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the images are the more passionate and 'realistic' in proportion to Beatrice's progressive rise in the hierarchy of mystical abstractions, where she becomes first Philosophy, then Wisdom, and finally Divine Knowledge. And one more small fact is that in the twenty-sixth Canto of the *Purgatorio* two of the troubadours most ardent in praising the beauty of their Ladies,' the Provençal Arnaut Daniel and the Tuscan Guido Guinicelli, are found in the sodomites' circle.<sup>1</sup>

But all this only compels us to recognize how complex is a problem, of which so far I have deliberately stressed only one aspect, and that the most disputed. We have too long been supposing that *cortezia* was a mere idealization of the sexual instinct. At the same time it would be going too far to assert that the mystical ideal on which *cortezia* must have been founded was always and everywhere being invoked, or that in itself it could have only one meaning. Nearly always an emphasis on chastity is accompanied by lewd excess. Without stopping to consider the charges of debauchery often brought against the troubadours—little, actually, is known about their lives—I may recall that at the same time as the Gnostic sects condemned creation, and in particular sexual attraction, they erected on their contempt a peculiarly licentious set of morals. For example, the Carpocratians forbade procreation, and also divinized the spermatic fluid.<sup>2</sup> It is quite probable that the Cathars were given to similar excesses, and especially that their disciples, the troubadours, were. Horrifying charges on this score are to be found in the records of the Inquisition. But similar charges have been brought against every new religion, not excepting primitive Christianity. Moreover, the records of the Inquisition are often contradictory. At

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this is the place to mention that a courtly knight often gave his Lady the masculine title of *mi dons* (*mi dominus*).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the documents translated and expounded in Wolfgang Schultz, *Dokumente der Gnosis* (Jena, 1910), pp. 158–64.



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times they state that the Cathars looked upon the most gross sensual indulgence as harmless, and at others that they condemned marriage and also sexual intercourse, whether legitimate or not.

So far, then, the scheme which I put forward at the beginning of Section 5 needs to be qualified as follows. Although deflexions of passion—in the strict sense I have given the word ‘passion’—have a religious and mystical inspiration, they unquestionably encourage the sexual instinct *by the very fact that they seek to transcend it*.

All this leads me to assert confidently now, however hesitant I may have felt at the outset, that courtly rhetoric was *at least inspired* by the mysticism of the Cathars. This may look like a moderate contention, but, once it is granted, I think it implies and explains a great deal more. It opens wide the vistas of which Aroux and Péladan had glimpses. And it is more than enough to justify my *religious* interpretation of the courtly myth of passion.

So that we may the better imagine how this minimum inspiration and influence came to operate, let me offer a present-day analogy. I think it may be laid down that the data concerning *Surréalisme* and the influence of Freud’s theories on this movement are fully determined and also are fully known (in the complete sense of ‘known’) to a number of persons now living. Let us suppose that in the future our civilization has been destroyed, and that at some date following its destruction a historian seeks to establish some of its details. Certain *surréaliste* poems have been found, and he is able to translate them and ascribe to them their correct date. He is further aware that more or less contemporaneously with *Surréalisme* there flourished a particular school of psychiatry. But no writings produced by this school survive. Fascism, which acceded to power soon afterwards, destroyed every one of them on the ground that they were Semitic. Nevertheless, the historian knows, thanks to booklets issued by adversaries of this

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school of psychiatry, that it put forward an erotic theory of dreams. The *surréaliste* poems that have been preserved and translated seem meaningless, and are open to the reproach of monotony—always employing a same set of erotic and bloodthirsty images and a same intense rhetoric, and it looks as if they must all have had a same author, &c. But then some persons come along and suggest that the poems merely describe dreams, and that perhaps they *are* no more than dreams that have been set down in writing. The suggestion is treated with unconcealed scepticism by authorities on the twentieth century. Thereupon, a writer—one of those people who are not to be taken seriously—offers the theory that the whole of *Surréalisme* was produced under the influence of psycho-analysis, and in support of this theory points to the coincidence of dates and the similarity of basic themes. The authorities on the twentieth century shrug their shoulders. ‘Establish your theory by means of documents’, they say. ‘You know very well there aren’t any.’

‘In that case, better to steer clear of coherent theories. Meanwhile, your common sense is enough to show you—

‘(a) That the little we know about psycho-analysis does not entitle us to look upon this doctrine as having inspired documents we already possess. (It seems clear that Freud was above all a scientist, that he had a theory of *libido*, and that he was a determinist; whereas *Surréalisme* was above all a literary movement; none of its surviving poems contain the word “libido”; and these poems all lean towards idealism and impulsiveness.)

‘(b) That the *Surréalistes* never *stated* in any poem that they were disciples of Freud.

‘(c) That the free will they extol is something every psycho-analyst was bound to deny.

‘(d) Finally, that it is by no means apparent how a science having for its aim the analysis and cure of neuroses could have inspired a rhetoric of insanity, which must have

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been a challenge to science in general and to the science of psycho-analysis in particular.'

So the future authorities on the twentieth century. It happens, however, that we—who are living in the twentieth century—know exactly how these improbable things actually occurred. We are aware that the men who promoted the *Surréaliste* movement had read Freud and that they looked on him with the greatest respect. We are aware that but for him their theories and their poesy would alike have been altogether different. We are aware that *surréaliste* poets felt no need and had no opportunity of referring to the *libido* in their writings. We are further aware that it was owing to an *initial misunderstanding* of the precise significance of Freud's (determinist and positivist) doctrines that the poets were led to seize on these doctrines as the subject-matter of their poesy—a most important point if all this is treated as analogical with what I am putting forward about the troubadours. And finally we are aware that it was only necessary for a few leaders of the movement to read Freud, and that the disciples were content to imitate the rhetoric of their masters.

Moreover, thanks to this analogy, it can be understood how a doctrine acts on poets less as a direct influence than by permeating their *atmosphere*, so that its central dogmas stir up shocked feelings and produce both a wish to be 'in the know' and a wish to seize opportunities of self-advantage. The work of the poets who are influenced will therefore display a good many mistakes, variations, and contradictions. Hence, supposing additional information about the exact nature of Freud's theories came to light in the future, far from providing authorities on the twentieth century with the confirmation they expected, it would only seem to contradict the theory of my mere 'writer, one of those people who are not to be taken seriously'.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Eppur si muove!* He would nevertheless be right, and the recognized authorities on the twentieth century in his day wrong.

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There remains one more objection—that, the rhetoric of the troubadours being highly elaborate, it is difficult to believe that a confused mixture of Manichaeism and Neo-Platonist doctrines operating upon a background of Celtiberian traditions could have given rise to it. This objection I have so far dealt with only indirectly and by passing allusion. It deserves a section to itself.

### IX

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It happens that as early as the ninth century there occurred an equally 'unlikely' fusion of Iranian Manichaeism, Neo-Platonism, and Mohammedanism in the vicinity of Asia Minor, and the fusion was reflected for a considerable period afterwards in a religious poetry employing erotic metaphors that are strikingly akin to those of courtly rhetoric. In the twelfth century the chief writers of this kind of poetry were al Hallaj, al Gazali, and Suhrawardi of Aleppo. All three were troubadours of supreme Love, of the Veiled Idea, which they treated as beloved object but also as symbol of a longing for the divine.<sup>1</sup>

Suhrawardi, who died in 1191, supposed Plato—whom he knew at second-hand from Plotinus, Proclus, and the Athenian school—to be a successor of Zoroaster. Indeed,

<sup>1</sup> It is thanks to French scholars that the work of these poets has recently become known in Europe. V. Louis Massignon, *La Passion de Al Hallaj* (Paris, 1921) and *Essai sur les Origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane* (Paris, 1922); Massignon and Kraus, *Akbbār al Hallaj* (Paris, 1936); Henry Corbin, 'Un Traité persan inédit de Suhrawardi d'Alep' and a translation of 'Le Familier des amants' in *Recherches philosophiques*, II (Paris, 1922-33); H. Corbin and P. Kraus, 'Le Bruissement de l'aile de Gabriel' in *Journal asiatique*, July-September 1935; and E. Dermenghem, 'Mortelle Poésie' in *Hermès*, II (Paris, 1933).

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his Neo-Platonism displays marked Iranian mythical features. In particular, the doctrines about an antithetical relation of the World of Light and the World of Darkness which he borrowed from the Zend-Avesta were those that had inspired Manes and that became the root of the Catharist faith. These doctrines—exactly as happened later with those of the Cathars—were transmuted into a chivalrous love rhetoric, the nature of which is indicated by the titles of two mystical treatises, *The Lovers' Familiar* and *The Romance of the Seven Beauties*. Moreover, at the time these and other similar treatises appeared there arose in a section of Islam a theological controversy of the same kind as occurred a little later in the medieval world of the West. It is true that in the Mohammedan world the controversy was made more intricate by a denial that man is able to *love* God (as the evangelical summary of the Law commands him). According to Mohammedanism, a finite creature can only love what is finite. In order therefore to express that love of the divine which they believed themselves to be experiencing, Arab mystics of the twelfth century had to resort to symbols having a secret meaning.<sup>1</sup> But, apart from this peculiarity—not without parallel in the situation of courtly rhetoric—the problems presented by the poetry of the Near East and by that of the West are identical.

Orthodox Mohammedanism was no more able than Roman Catholicism to allow that there is in man an element which in being cultivated will bring about the fusion of individual souls with the Divinity. But it was precisely this potential union of Creator and creature that was being implied in the erotico-religious *language* of Arab mystic poetry. The symbolism employed by the poets caused them accordingly to be accused of holding a disguised Manichaeism, and the charge cost al Hallaj and Suhrawardi

<sup>1</sup> Thus praise of wine—wine being forbidden by the Prophet—became symbolical of the divine intoxication of love.

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their lives. There is something poignant in the discovery that the grounds of the controversy are those which reappear in the case of the troubadours, and, later on—as we shall see—in the case of two great Western mystics, Master Eckhart and John of the Cross.

A brief account of the 'courtly' themes that figure in poetic expositions of Arab mysticism will show how thoroughly the parallel holds both as regards inspiration and expression. Suhrawardi speaks of lovers as being *Brethren of the Truth*. This was a name given to all mystic lovers who were at one with their beloved in a mutual idealization and who came to form a community analogous to the Catharist Church of Love. Mystics of the illuminative school of Suhrawardi were inspired by Iranian Manichaeism, and recently discovered documents relating to this faith contain a fable about a lovely maiden who awaits the true believer on the far side of the Bridge of Sinvat. When he appears she says to him: 'I am thyself!' According to certain interpreters of troubadour mysticism, the Lady of Thoughts is no other than the spiritual and angelical part of man—his true *self*. This may help towards a fuller understanding of what I have called 'the narcissism of passion'.<sup>1</sup>

*The Lovers' Familiar* is built upon an allegory of 'The Castle of the Soul' which has various floors and compartments. In one compartment there is a feminine being called 'The Veiled Idea. She possesses secrets that will assuage and it is she who can impart magic.'<sup>2</sup> Other allegorical characters in the Castle include Beauty, Desire and Dread, the Well-Informed, the Tester, the Well-Known—all of whom recall the *Roman de la rose*. The same chivalric symbolism is found in *The Romance of the Seven Beauties*, the treatise in which Nizami of Ganja describes the adventures of seven maidens attired in the colours of the planets

<sup>1</sup> Book I, §8, in connexion with Tristan.

<sup>2</sup> The Celtic *Essylt* was also a magician, 'an object of contemplation and a mystic vision'.

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and who are visited by a knight-king. The Castle of the Soul became a favourite symbol for Ruysbroek and Saint Teresa. In a poem by Omar Ibn al Faridh—to take one among dozens of instances—the author describes the terrible passion holding him in thrall:

My fellow-citizens, surprised at seeing me a slave, said:  
‘Why is this youth mad?’

And what can they say of me except that I am concerned  
with Nu’m?

Indeed, yes, I am concerned with Nu’m.

When Nu’m gratifies me with a glance, I mind not if  
Su’da is unkind.

Nu’m is a conventional name for a man’s beloved, and here it means ‘God’. The troubadours also gave to their Lady of Thoughts a conventional name or *senbal*; and authorities to-day have vainly striven to discover who are the historical persons such names refer to.

Both the *salutation* and the *salute* that the initiated wish to give on approaching the Sage, but that the latter considerately gives first,<sup>1</sup> are a constant poetic theme of the troubadours’, and later of Dante’s, and eventually of Petrarch’s. All these poets attach extreme importance to the ‘salute’ given by the Lady,<sup>2</sup> and their doing so is easily understood if we bear in mind the two senses of *salutare*—namely, ‘to greet’ and ‘to save’.

Arab mystics all insist that the *secret* of divine Love must be kept. They constantly complain of prying persons who want to find out about the mysteries, but not to take part in them with a whole-hearted faith. To somebody’s hasty question: ‘What is Sufism?’ al Hallaj replies: ‘Do not turn on Us; see our finger which has already been stained with the blood of lovers.’ Moreover, the prying

<sup>1</sup> Suhrawardi, *The Rustling of Gabriel’s Wing*.

<sup>2</sup> People nowadays can see in ‘courtesy’ no more than an extravagant refinement of preciousness, and this sums up their misapprehensions about the very meaning of the word ‘courtly’.

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are suspected of evil intentions: it is they who give lovers away to the orthodox authorities—that is, who disclose to the custodians of dogma the secret meaning of the allegories. Likewise in most of the Provençal poems there are characters described as *losengiers*—backbiters, prying persons, spies—upon whom the troubadours heap invective. Our learned commentators nowadays have been rather hard put to it to explain these inconvenient *losengiers*, and have sought to dispose of the problem thus presented by alleging that in the twelfth century lovers must have set great store by keeping their affairs secret (whereby no doubt they differed from lovers in other periods!).

Then also the eulogy of a death due to love is the leit-motiv of Arab mystic poesy. Ibn al Faridh wrote:

The repose of love is a weariness; its onset, a sickness;  
its end, death.

For me, however, death through love is life; I give  
thanks to my Belovèd that she has held it out to me.

Whoever does not die of his love is unable to live by it.

This is the same cry that we find in Western mysticism, and *also* in Provençal poesy. Saint Teresa's ejaculatory prayer, furthermore, was 'I die of not being able to die!' Al Hallaj wrote: 'In killing me you shall make me live, because for me to die is to live and to live is but to die.' Life is indeed the terrestrial day of beings in a contingent world, in the whirl of matter; but death is the Night of Illumination, the vanishing of illusory forms, the Soul's union with the Beloved, a communion with Absolute Being. Hence for Arab mystics it is Moses who symbolizes the greatest of Lovers, because in having declared on Sinai his wish *to see* God he is held to have expressed a wish for death. And it is easy to understand that the final stage of the illuminative way taken by Suhrawardi and Al Hallaj had to be religious martyrdom at the summit of *joy d'amor*.

'Al Hallaj went to execution laughing. I said to him:



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“Master, why this?” He replied: “Such is the playfulness of beauty as she draws her lovers to her.”’

Up to the present day there has been no means of ascertaining how Arab mysticism together with its courtly rhetoric was transmitted in less than a century to the initiates of the Church of Love and from these to the poets of Southern France. The most likely geographical road is Spain, since this is where the Arab and Christian worlds were in contact. For that matter, the crusades may have had a considerable share in the transmission. But the similarity of treatment, themes, and difficulties is enough to dispose of the objection I am dealing with—how could a confused mixture of more or less Christian, Manichaean and Neo-Platonist doctrines have produced a rhetoric as *elaborate* as that of the troubadours? There is no reason to suppose that the same causes—the same religious currents—failed to have the same effects in the South of France as in Syria and Asia Minor. Moreover, researches carried out by Asin Palacios<sup>1</sup> should put us on the track of important discoveries regarding the connexions between Sufi mysticism and Western poetry, though at a later period, it is true. Asin Palacios suggests that Dante’s model for the *Commedia* was the *Book of Nocturnal Journeyings* by the mystic Ibn el Arabi, written eighty years earlier. This is the account of a journey through three extra-terrestrial regions—hell, purgatory, and paradise—with the same encounters and adventures as in the *Commedia* and many similar characters. Nearly ninety years ago Aroux averred that Dante was one of the Order of Templars, which, he said, was certainly associated with a Mohammedan order of the same kind, having identical rules and even an identical habit—the Order of Assakkis, and to this Ibn el Arabi belonged.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Miguel Asin Palacios, *La Escatologia musulmana en la Divina Comedia* (Madrid, 1919).

<sup>2</sup> Eugène Aroux, *Dante, révolutionnaire, hérétique et socialiste* (Paris, 1854).

## COURTLY LOVE TO ARTHURIAN ROMANCE

### X

#### FROM COURTLY LOVE TO ARTHURIAN ROMANCE

If now from the South of France we move to the North, we find that in the Arthurian romances—*Tristan*, *Lancelot* and the whole cycle—courtly love and its rhetoric with a double meaning were transferred from song to narrative. It has been said that the first courtly romance was born from the contact of alien legends with the notion of courtesy. The alien legends in question were the ancient Celtic sacred mysteries (of which, as it happens, writers such as Béroul and Chrétien de Troyes were not more than half aware) mingled with bits of Greek mythology. How far the literature of Southern and of Northern France were independent of one another has been the subject of prolonged controversy. To-day it seems to be agreed that the poets of the Romanic South communicated their style and secret doctrines to the 'storytellers' of the Round Table cycle. And the course of the transmission may be traced in historical documents.

Eleanor of Aquitaine left her Court of Love—in the South of France, the region of the *langue d'oc*—in order to marry Louis the Seventh, who was king of France from 1137 to 1180; and then, in 1152, she married Henry, who two years later became king of England.<sup>1</sup> At each removal she took her troubadours with her. It is thanks to her and to them, among others, that the Anglo-Norman *trouvères* became possessed of the secret rules of courtly love. Chrétien de Troyes says that both the matter and spirit of his

<sup>1</sup> Her son, Richard Cœur de Lion, the friend of the Gascon troubadours and himself a troubadour, was excommunicated by Rome.

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romances were obtained from Countess Marie of Champagne, Eleanor's daughter. Chrestien wrote a Tristan romance, the MSS. of which have been lost. Béroul was a Norman, Thomas an Englishman. And, reciprocally, the Tristan legend became known over a considerable part of Southern France. So rapid an interaction can be accounted for by the existence of a former connexion between the South of before the Cathars and the Gaelic and British Celts. It was noted earlier that the religion of the druids—whence filids and bards derived their traditions—taught a dualistic view of the universe and made Woman into a symbol of the divine. Now, according to Otto Rahn, the Christian heresy of the 'Perfecti' drew certain features of its mythology from its Celtiberian background. It was only natural that in the hands of the poets of the North this mythology should have been invested with darker and more tragic colours. Taranis, god of the stormy sky, takes the place of Lug, god of the sunlit sky. And although the courtly doctrine picked up and revived former aboriginal traditions, it was nevertheless something the trouvères had learned, not something they had grown up in. That is why they often misinterpret it.

For that matter, it is extremely difficult to bring out the causes or to estimate the precise bearing of their misunderstandings. We do not know if Chrestien de Troyes thoroughly grasped the rules of love which he was taught by Marie of Champagne. We do not know to what extent he *wished* to make his romances secret chronicles of the persecuted Church<sup>1</sup> or mere allegories of courtly morality and mysticism. It is easy to see why there is an absence of written evidence here. Many interests must have joined forces to prevent the heresy from being spread, and the heresy on its side wished to remain esoteric. Obviously, however, Chrestien de Troyes distorts the meaning of the

<sup>1</sup> As has been supposed by Otto Rahn, Péladan, and Eugène Aroux.

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myths he recounts. In the Lancelot romance, which dates from about 1225, symbolism and allegory are obviously both present, however incongruous are the elucidations with which the author follows his account of each episode. One elucidation, however, deserves to be mentioned, because, notwithstanding the author's unawareness of what he was saying, its Catharist origin is beyond question. Lancelot, while wandering in the forest, reaches a place where his road forks. He hesitates between going left or right. Then, in spite of the warning given on a cross which appears in front of him, he goes to the left. Before long a knight in white armour rides up, throws him off his horse, and takes away his crown. The crestfallen Lancelot then meets a priest, to whom he makes confession. 'I shall tell you the meaning of what has befallen you', the priest says. 'The road to the right which you ignored at the fork was that of earthly chivalry, in which you have long triumphed; the road to the left was that of heavenly chivalry, which allows no killing of men or overcoming of champions by force of arms: it is the realm of spiritual things. And you bore with you on this road the crown of pride. That is why the knight overthrew you so easily; for he represented the very sin you had committed.'

After that literary historians are at liberty to talk about 'incredible adventures', 'easily contrived marvels', 'touching ingenuousness', 'primitive freshness', and so on. A little more penetration would lead us to see, on the contrary, that the real barbarism is displayed in our contemporary notion of the novel, which we are quite content to take as a faked photograph of events without significance, whereas Arthurian romance was knit by an intimate *coherence* of which we no longer possess so much as an inkling. Actually, in these wonderful adventures nothing whatever is without its meaning; everything is symbol or delicate allegory; and only the ignorant stop short at the apparent puerility of the tale, this puerility being intended

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of course to conceal the underlying meaning from the superficial glances of the *uninformed*.

But even if the *trouvères* were inferior to the *troubadours* in mystical wisdom, their romances do not consist merely of *errors*. They dealt with a new theme, that of physical love, the theme of the fault.<sup>1</sup> The writings of Chrestien de Troyes are not only love poems, as has so often been said; they are also genuine *romances*. For, unlike the Provençal poems, they take the trouble to describe the betrayals of love, instead of merely expressing the passionate surge in its mystical purity. The starting-point of both *Lancelot* and *Tristan* is a sin against courtly love—the physical possession of a real woman and hence a ‘profanation’ of love. It is owing to this initial fault on his part that Lancelot fails to find the Grail, and is humiliated countless times while wandering along the celestial way. He has chosen the earthly road, he has betrayed mystic Love, he is not one of the ‘Pure’. Alone the ‘Pure’—true ‘savages’ such as Bohort, Perceval, and Galahad—can be granted initiation. Clearly the account of his wanderings and of the penalties he suffers required the narrative form, not that of mere song.<sup>2</sup> Thus there are reasons of a spiritual nature to account for the elaboration of a new literary style—the style of the romance—which was to become truly literary, however, only later on, when, having got detached from the myth—by then provisionally exhausted—it turned into the novel at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

<sup>1</sup> I mean of course ‘fault’ in the courtly sense, and not as understood in Christian morality.

<sup>2</sup> In *Tristan* the initial fault is painfully redeemed by the long penance which the lovers undergo. That is why the tale ends ‘well’ from the standpoint of Catharist mysticism—that is to say, why it culminates in a double self-inflicted death.

XI

FROM CELTIC MYTHS TO  
ARTHURIAN ROMANCE

*Tristan* must seem the most thoroughly courtly of Arthurian romances because the epic element—the battles and schemings—is reduced to a minimum and the tragic development of the religious doctrine alone determines the strong and elemental progress of the tale. But *Tristan* is also the most ‘Arthurian’ of courtly romances, because it incorporates religious and mythological components that are plainly of Celtic origin to a much greater extent than do the romances of the Round Table, and in a way that renders these elements sharply identifiable.

Hubert very truly says about Gaelic literature that ‘it contains matter derived from the religion of the Ancient Britons as by a miracle; for it arose in a Christian country that had been first Romanized and then colonized by the Irish.’<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless the miracle is attested by a large number of the incidents exploited by Bérout and Thomas, incidents that it has only become possible to account for thanks to the most recent archaeological discoveries about the Celts. Actually, the religious matter has such vigorous poetic power that its survival is easy enough to understand, even in a world which had lost the druidical faith and forgotten the meaning of the druidical mysteries.

The cycle of Irish legends contains many tales about a journey which the hero undertakes to the country of the dead. This hero—Bran, Cuchulinn, or Oisín—‘*is attracted by a mysterious beauty*’; ‘he sets sail in a *magic ship*’; and he lands in a wonderful country. ‘In the end he wearies of this land, and wants to return home. It is in order to die.’<sup>2</sup> This

<sup>1</sup> H. Hubert, *Les Celtes*, II, p. 286.

<sup>2</sup> Hubert, *op. cit.*, II, p. 298.

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evidently is the source of the wounded Tristan's first aimless sea journey which results in his finding the magic balm. Other situations in the Tristan romance have fairly close prototypes in the stories of the Irish cycle. For example, in the tragic idyll of *Diarmaid and Grainne* the two lovers flee to the forest, where the husband pursues them. In *Baile and Ailinn* the lovers arrange to meet in a deserted spot, where death has preceded them and prevents their coming together; 'for it had been predicted by the druids that they would never meet in life, but that they would meet after death, and then never be parted again.'

It would be easy to note further similarities. But the resemblance between certain features of behaviour is even more striking. It will be remembered that Tristan is an orphan and that he is brought up in the castle of his uncle, King Mark. Now it frequently happened among the Celts in the most remote times that children were entrusted 'to the care of a qualified person in some great house, a house of men'. They were taught there by a druid, and were thus sheltered from women. 'This institution, which is commonly given the Anglo-Norman name of "fosterage", was retained in Celtic countries: we find children being entrusted to foster-parents, of whose family they became members, as is shown by the fact that a certain number acquired the family name of their foster-father. These foster-fathers were sought either among members of the mother's family or among druids.'<sup>1</sup> In the same way, Tristan, who is brought up by Mark, his maternal uncle, becomes by fosterage the king's 'son'.<sup>2</sup> The Celtic custom of overbidding one another in exchanges of ritual gifts also

<sup>1</sup> Hubert, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 243-4.

<sup>2</sup> Psycho-analysts will not fail to look upon the unhappy affair of Tristan and Iseult as the consequence of an Oedipus complex. But foster-fathers sometimes had as many as fifty legal sons—so that the link was rather weak—and also, as many documents testify, incest was permitted among the Celts.

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figures in *Tristan* and in the Romances of the Round Table. Many episodes begin with a 'blank' promise made by the king to some damsel who has asked him for a gift, without saying of what. As a rule, the damsel wants some highly dangerous mission undertaken. 'Tournaments', Hubert says,<sup>1</sup> 'certainly formed part of this vast system of competition and of outbidding one another.' Further, it is well known that Celtic youths, on reaching puberty—that is, at the time they left the house of men—had to accomplish some feat—the killing of a stranger or some prowess of the chase—in order to win the right to marry. The battle with the Morholt in *Tristan* is the exact reproduction of that custom, although in the Romance there is no allusion to its sacred origin. All this renders Hubert's theory plausible—that Celtic mythology was transmitted to the courtly cycle, not through any properly religious channels, but by a more profane cult of heroes and of prowess, which had gradually replaced the gods and their worship in popular legend.

'Gaston Paris noted with acumen that the romance of Tristan and Iseult gives forth a peculiar note which is not heard again in medieval literature, and he accounted for this by the Celtic origin of the poems. It is through Tristan and through Arthur that the most limpid and precious part of the Celtic genius was incorporated in the European spirit.'

Thus Hubert.<sup>2</sup> The 'peculiar note' which Bédier has admirably reproduced in his modern transcription of the legend so unmistakably finds the path to our hearts that we can *isolate* the non-Celtic, and therefore courtly, element which was responsible in the twelfth century for the production of the myth. What differentiates an Irish legend from the legend told by Béroul and Thomas is that in the former what brings disaster is an entirely external *fate*, whereas in the latter it is a secret but unerring *wish* on the part of the two mystic lovers. In Celtic legends action and

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., II, p. 234.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., II, p. 336.



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ending are determined by an *epic* element, in courtly romances by an *internal tragedy*. Then also Celtic love—in spite of the religious sublimation of Woman by the druids—is above all a sensual love.<sup>1</sup> The fact that in some legends this love is secretly at war with orthodox religious love, and is thus compelled to express itself in esoteric symbols, helps us to see how it came about that the British background was so easily absorbed into the symbolism of the courtly romance. But the analogy remains theoretical, although it has doubtless encouraged the modern tendency to confuse Tristan's passion with mere sensuality.

A couple of quotations from Thomas, the most self-conscious of the authors of the five early versions of the legend, will be enough to show how original the courtly myth is. The cohesive principle which Catharist mysticism gave to the religious, sociological or epic elements that had been inherited from the old British background, is expressed and *expounded* in a language astonishingly modern. The principle is that suffering considered as an *askesis* has to be loved—the suffering is indeed the 'beloved pain' of the troubadours. Tristan, on the night of his marriage to Iseult of the White Hand, faces the cruellest of struggles within himself, for he cannot decide to possess his wife.

'Ysolt as Blanches Mains he desired for her beauty and for her name Ysolt: for the beauty alone that was in her, he had not desired her if she had not the name Ysolt, nor for the name without the beauty. . . . Tristram would fain have vengeance; yet *for his malady he seeketh such vengeance as will double his torment.*'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is evidenced, for example, by *Tannhäuser*. The *Tannhäuser* of the sixteenth century is a late German adaptation of Hiberno-Scottish legends; it owes nothing whatever to courtly influence. The Montsalvat (or Montségur) of the Chaste (or Cathars) is replaced by the Venusberg!

<sup>2</sup> *The Romance of Tristram and Ysolt by Thomas of Britain*, translated by Roger Sherman Loomis (New York, 1931). M. de Rougemont's italics.

## CELTIC MYTHS TO ARTHURIAN ROMANCE

By the very fact that Iseult of the White Hand is now his wife, he must not and cannot any longer desire her.

‘An the good that he hath were not his, he had not despised it in his heart: but that which it behoveth him to have, he may not heartily love. If he might not have that he hath, he had longed to win it: he would think to find it better than his own: and *för this cause he may not love his own*. . . . This befalleth many men: when they have some travail and anguish and great pain and distress, *such things they do to escape and deliver and avenge them as thereof cometh great harm*: often they do of purpose things whereof they endure sorrow. I have seen it betide unto many that when they may not have their desire or thing that they love, they strive unto their utmost power: of their distress they do such deeds whereby oftentimes they double their grief. . . . Whosoever doth that he desireth not to do because that he may not have some good thing, doth his will despite his desire.’<sup>1</sup> (*Encontre désir fait volier*, are Thomas’s own words.)

A Celtic background of religious legends—which, as it happens, were at a very remote period common to both the Iberian South and its *langue d’oc*; customs of feudal chivalry; semblances of Christian orthodoxy; a sometimes very compliant sensuality; and, finally, the individual fancy of each of the poets—there, when all is said and done, are the materials thanks to which the doctrine of Love underwent its transmutations. In this way was the Tristan myth born. I am far from intending to analyse the metamorphosis; it eludes us doubly, in being poetic and in being mystical. But we now know whence the myth came and whither it must lead. And perhaps we have gained an inkling—although this is something that could not be put into words—how the myth may be enacted in an individual human life or embodied in a piece of imaginative literature.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid. M. de Rougemont’s italics.

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### XII

#### WHAT HAS BEEN ASCERTAINED SO FAR

Allowing for the change of key which was effected in the poetic language of courtly love when this language passed from the South of the troubadours to the less civilized North of the trouvères, we can now realize that all our peregrinations finally lead to Béroul's masterpiece. The religions of Antiquity, some of the mystic systems of the Near East, the heresy thanks to which they were revived in Languedoc, the reaction against heresy in the Western mind and in feudal custom—all that resonates in a muffled way right through the myth. We have thus been brought back to the *Romance of Tristan*, having ascertained why it was necessarily written at a particular time, the very time in which certain particular heretical traditions intersected, as it were, certain particular institutions whereby those traditions stood condemned; for that was the moment when the heretical traditions were compelled to find expression in equivocal symbols and to take on the form of a myth.

Taking these convergences in the aggregate, it becomes possible to say that *the passionate love which the myth celebrates actually became in the twelfth century—the moment when first it began to be cultivated—a religion in the full sense of the word, and in particular a Christian heresy historically determined*. Whereupon it may be inferred (a) that the passion which novels and films have now popularized is nothing else than a lawless invasion and flowing back into our lives of a spiritual heresy the key to which we have lost; and (b) that underlying the modern breakdown of marriage is nothing less than a struggle between two religious traditions, or, in other words, a *decision* which almost always we reach unconsciously, in complete ignorance of

WHAT HAS BEEN ASCERTAINED SO FAR  
the causes, ends, and perils involved, and for the sake of  
a morality which, although still alive, we no longer know  
how to justify.

Moreover, passion and the passion myth are active in  
many other ways than that which affects our private lives.

*Orthodox mysticism* in Europe has been another passion,  
and its metaphorical language is at times curiously akin to  
that of courtly love.

Considered chronologically, the great body of European  
*literature* expresses nothing other than an increasing secu-  
larization of the myth, or—as I would rather say—succe-  
ssive ‘profanations’ of its content and form.

Finally, *war* in Europe, and every one of the formal  
modes of conducting it down to about 1914, kept pace with  
the transformations of the myth, largely owing to their  
chivalric origin, and perhaps for other reasons as well.

Such are the matters to be dealt with in the Books that  
follow.



*Book Three*

*Passion and Mysticism*



## I

### HOW THE PROBLEM STANDS

Attempts to account for mysticism have often consisted of saying that it is a deflexion of human love; which is but to say that it is a form of sexuality. My examination of the *Romance of Tristan* and of its historical sources has led me to reverse the relation. In this particular case it is fatal passion which has to be identified as a form of mysticism, more or less conscious and definite. That is of course no warrant for generalization; but at least it calls for the re-statement of a problem which nineteenth-century materialism had thought itself qualified to settle to the detriment of mysticism. Very likely the problem is not one open to being solved simply and finally. But how it stands does require to be made clear.

Whether passion is being treated as a form of mysticism, or vice versa, the two are assumed to be in *some* relation. Possibly, however, it is the nature of language which leads us to discern such connexions. It has long been recognized that the metaphors of love and of mysticism are akin. But the closest similarities in vocabulary do not necessarily argue any likeness between the things that the words refer to. Thus up to a point we may be the victims of a verbal illusion—of a kind of protracted punning. Nevertheless, here is a problem that has to be faced. Let me indicate why.

In the first place, if passion involved no more than physiological factors the Tristan myth would be devoid of significance. Sexual instincts are manifested as a hunger, and this hunger, like that for food, tends to obtain satisfaction at any cost. The more ravenous, the more indiscriminate it becomes. But the passion of the myth is compelled



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by its very nature to reject satisfaction. The more intense, the more it recoils from being assuaged. This passion, therefore, is not a hunger, but a kind of drug which produces intoxication. The other day somebody declared that every person under the influence of a drug is for the moment a mystic unawares. But there can be no intoxication, physical or moral, except by the effect of some *foreign* agent, which instinct, left to itself, would get rid of as quickly as possible. Animals do not become intoxicated.<sup>1</sup>

In the second place, and conversely, mysticism does not seem able by itself to account for passion. As soon as we suppose that it does, we see that this involves explaining why the most striking metaphors employed in mystical writings are drawn from the language of sexual love, and not, for example, from the vocabulary of breathing or nutrition; why what it has *invariably* been attempted to equate with mysticism should be sexual instincts, and this long before the advent of Freud and his school.

Such being the dilemma in which we are landed if we try to treat passionate love as a mere matter of sex, it is evident that we then do not know what we are talking about. And yet to seek to connect this love with anything alien to sex must have very queer results, as Schopenhauer remarked more or less. Let us treat the problem as it is propounded by the myth, and as it must have appeared in the twelfth century. An actual instance—especially as it is a piece of literature produced *before* there arose the great wave of orthodox mysticism—supplies the best starting-point for an inquiry into how the 'very queer results' arise.

<sup>1</sup> There is, it is true, *formica sanguinea*, an insect which keeps in its nest a parasite exuding a delicious sweat, and the presence of the parasite ends by upsetting everything. This ant's pathological habit has been compared to dipsomania. So long as ants remain speechless, any theory is possible.

## ‘TRISTAN’ AS A MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

### II

## ‘TRISTAN’ AS THE ACCOUNT OF A MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

As we have seen, the *Romance of Tristan* is in many respects a first ‘profanation’ of courtly mysticism and of the doctrines which had inspired it—Neo-Platonism, Manichaeism, and Sufism. The mythopoeic process was only too successful, either because Béroul and Thomas, or their forerunner, did not fathom at all points the unalloyed teaching of courtesy, or else because they were carried away by the ardour of narrative construction and wished to meet the inclinations of their audience, which consisted of people less strictly supervised than were the inhabitants of the South. For indeed what distinguishes the Romance is that its plot revolves upon a *fault* committed in defiance of the rule of courtly love, since the whole dramatic story proceeds from there having been intercourse. That is how it is a *romance* in the modern sense, not merely a poem. Yet, taking them together, and bearing in mind what provides the internal motive power of the action, most of the situations mark stages in a mystical career. There are ‘moments’ in the pure tradition of the Cathars, and others can be connected with mystical experience in general as regards details which are identical among orthodox and heterodox alike, and also among the pagans—Iranians, Arabs, and even Buddhists. It will not do therefore to suppose that we are dealing with some commonplace romance about adultery. Tristan is unfaithful to heresy, the mystic virtue of the ‘Pure’, which was a *virtue* also for the authors of the legend. The fault lies not in his being in love, but in his fulfilment of his love.

To compare two forms of mystical experience is a delicate and perilous task, and all the more so here for the fact

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that one of them is distorted by an epic superstructure. Nevertheless, let me suggest a rough parallel between what happens to Tristan and a properly mystical experience. After being wounded in overcoming the Morholt, he has himself put on board a boat with neither sail nor oar. The boat is cast adrift, so that he may go in quest of the soothing balm which shall rid his blood of its poison. This is the very model of a yielding up to the influence of the supernatural at the beginning of a mystical experience. This is how a soul, fatally wounded by sin, renounces rational and visible aids, and goes in quest of an unknown grace. Modern poetry supplies many accounts of this desperate but significant setting out at a venture, which, although then but a rudimentary form of the mystic quest, reminds us of the sword and harp that Tristan takes with him—symbols of a challenge to existing society. Few no doubt of our latter-day poets know anything about a ‘fatal love’. For some the quest dwindles into a pleasant cruise from which they return with a manuscript ready for the press. Others distil a drug productive of picturesque visions. Nearly all give the secret away.

But Tristan has met love. At first he failed to recognize it. When King Mark—established authority—despatches him to bring back the far-away princess he does not suspect that the mission is going to seal his own fate. Then occurs the irremediable mistake of drinking the *love-potion*. In analysing the content of the myth, I pointed out that, owing to its irremediable nature, the mistake is tantamount to an alibi. The lovers insist that they have been in no way to blame for anything they have done, as their passion cannot be acknowledged either to society (which looks upon it as criminal) or to themselves (since it condemns them to die). That is the psychological aspect of their experience. But there is a religious aspect also. The irrevocable drinking of the potion, which appears at the time to be due to chance, but which looks afterwards as if everything had

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conspired to bring it about, symbolizes a soul's *election* by omnipotent Love, its being seized by its vocation as if in its own despire. Thereupon, with the drinking of the potion, Tristan (as Gottfried of Strasbourg says of Tristan's father) 'entered upon another life'. To quote Gottfried further: 'His senses were as though delivered from all natural curbs, and his life was being consumed.' The words perfectly confirm what I have described as passion in opposition to what is natural love.

In the ordinary way this first and crucial summons should open the way to fasting and self-mortification, and lead to an *endura*. But Tristan, carried away by the violent effect of a sudden revelation such as may sometimes inflame the blood, transgresses the rule of the 'Pure'. He obtains his symbolical kiss by force, and profanes it. Thereupon the powers of evil are let loose.

Sigh, ah sigh, wind so wild!

Sigh, ah sigh now, my child!

O Irish maid, thou wayward, winsome maid!

A lifetime's penance becomes requisite in order to wipe out the sacrilege. But the fundamental misfortune of this love is not only that the sin must be redeemed. The *askesis* of self-redemption must also, and above all, deliver a man from having been born into this world of darkness and lead him to the state of final and fortunate detachment in which he can undergo the deliberate death of the 'Perfect'. Tristan's penance therefore has a meaning entirely different from Christian repentance. And although there are times in the Romance when orthodoxy and heresy seem to get singularly mixed, such indications leave one in no doubt regarding the predominant intention, an intention made unmistakable at the last by the death of the two lovers in sombre splendour. Every episode, moreover, points to this intention; for example, that of the 'harsh life' led by Tristan and Iseult in the Forest of Morrois. In the *Roman*

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*en prose*, 'We have lost the world, and the world us', Iseult laments; and Tristan answers: 'If the whole world were now with us, I should see but you alone.' This is clearly a reference to *endura*. The retreat in the forest symbolizes a period of fasting and self-mortification such as we know that the Cathars underwent in order that their faculties might be all absorbed in the exclusive contemplation of love.

A profound characteristic of passion, and also of mysticism in general, may be discerned here. Later Novalis, a mystic devoted to Night and to a secret Light, wrote: 'The lover is alone with all that he loves.' For that matter, among many possible interpretations, it can be held that his maxim states a purely psychological piece of observation—that passion is by no means the fuller life which it seems to be in the dreams of adolescence, but is on the contrary a kind of naked and denuding intensity; verily, a bitter destitution, the *impoverishment* of a mind being emptied of all diversity, an obsession of the imagination by a single image. In the face of the assertion of its power, the world dissolves; 'the others' cease to be present; and there are no longer either neighbours or duties, or binding ties, or earth or sky: one is alone with all that one loves. 'We have lost the world, and the world us.' Such is ecstasy, a flight inward from all created things. How can we avoid calling to mind those 'deserts' of the Dark Night described by Saint John of the Cross! 'Put things far away, lover! My road is flight!' And several centuries before Novalis Saint Teresa of Avila declared that a soul when in ecstasy should feel 'as if the world consisted only of God and itself'.

Are we entitled to compare religious geniuses of the first rank with a poem in which the mystical element is quite rudimentary? Admittedly, to do so would be blasphemy of a kind if the Romance were concerned with no more than a passion of sensual love. But everything points

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of our being on the *via mystica* of the ‘Perfect’. The difference from orthodox mysticism lies in the content of the spiritual states and the goal of those states, not in their form.<sup>1</sup> I shall return to this presently.

In the meanwhile, here is a further point of comparison. Spanish mystics have a well-known habit of insisting on an account of what they *suffer*. Saint John of the Cross says in *La Noche oscura*:<sup>2</sup>

‘So brilliant and pure is the light of contemplation that when this Divine light assails the soul, in order to expel its impurity, the soul feels itself to be so impure and miserable

<sup>1</sup> Gottfried of Strasbourg’s *Tristan* contains the following passage:

It is not without reason  
That this hollow  
Has been put away in a wilderness.  
It means  
That the place of love  
Lies not in beaten ways  
Nor about our human dwellings.  
Love haunts the deserts.  
The road that leads to its retreat  
Is a hard and toilsome road.

Should it still be doubted what kind of love is being referred to, let me say that Gottfried admits having wandered in the desert himself, but without meeting the reward of his pains (he means that he has not become one of the ‘Perfect’).

I have known the hollow  
When only eleven years old.  
But to Cornwall have I never been.

How could physical love be intended here? The last line shows clearly that the ‘hollow’ is purely symbolical, since it may exist elsewhere than in Cornwall. Possibly ‘Cornwall’ stands for a temple or grotto of the heretics.

<sup>2</sup> Saint John of the Cross, *Complete Works*, translated by E. Allison Peers (London, 1934), I, p. 407. *The Dark Night of the Soul*, II, v.

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that it believes God to be against it, and thinks that it has set itself up against God. This causes it so much grief and pain (because it now believes that God has cast it away) that one of the greatest trials which Job felt when God sent him this experience, was as follows, when he said: "Why hast thou set me opposite to thee, and I am become burdensome to myself?"

A hundred pages could be quoted in which there recurs the same lament of the soul about feeling deserted by the divine and being overwhelmingly anguished; about 'the sense of a deep void . . . of a cruel death to the three kinds of goods that may assuage the soul—temporal, natural, and spiritual goods'; and about 'the feeling of rejection which counts among the sternest ordeals of the state of purification'.

*Tristan* is but an adulterated and sometimes ambiguous expression of courtly mysticism. In interpreting some of those situations in the Romance which seem most thoroughly 'mystical', it is wise, if we do not wish to go seriously astray, to set out from human love and by way of sublimation—not in the opposite direction, from divine Love to metaphors, as we need to do when dealing with the great orthodox mystics. Bearing this in mind, we may trace in the myth more than one aspect of the sufferings undergone in mystical experience. It will be recalled how the troubadour laments:

Heaven! How doth it thus befall?

The farther off I am the more I long for her.

And, indeed, never does love thrill *Tristan* so wildly as when he is parted from his 'lady'. This can be accounted for by elementary psychology, but the point here is that it represents the anguish undergone in a purifying *askesis*. We have seen that in the Romance the repeated *partings* of the lovers answer to an altogether internal necessity of their passion. Iseult is a woman beloved, but she is also

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more than this: she is a symbol of luminous Love. When Tristan wanders far away from her, his love for her waxes, and the more he loves her the more he is afflicted. But of course by now we are aware that the real purpose of the partings is to produce suffering. This brings us back to mysticism from the other end, so to speak. The more Tristan loves, the more he wants to be parted from the beloved. This means that the more he loves, the more he wants to be rejected by love. So strongly does he want to be rejected that he comes to doubt Iseult's 'love' for him, treats her like an adversary, and commits himself to a 'blank' marriage with the other Iseult—the other 'faith', the other Church, whose communion he has to decline!

Only in one passage of the Romance does orthodoxy for a moment have the better part. When the effect of the love-potion has at last worn off, Tristan and Iseult go to visit the hermit Ogrin in his cell. This results in a meeting between one who endures for the sake of his God and the lovers who endure for the sake of another Love. It is then that they repent—for the first and last time. Iseult is to go back to her legal husband—heresy is to return to the bosom of the Church. But as the king draws near with his escort of barons, the lovers exchange a ring of everlasting fidelity and secrecy. Submission is but simulated. And presently in demanding the ordeal of the red iron the queen is seeking to avenge herself upon the king's God, whom this ordeal dupes twice.

However external and a matter of form these correspondences may be, they cannot reasonably be dismissed as mere coincidences. But if the forms are the same, it remains to be seen in what respect the matter differs and how the matter can ever have come to be treated as identical in both cases. What, it seems to me, lies at the heart of the antithesis between the two forms of mysticism is that the Romance deals, not merely with profane and natural love, but with *passionate* love. Orthodox mysticism brings about



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a 'spiritual marriage' of God and the individual soul already in this life, whereas the heretical looks to union and complete fusion, and this only after the demise of the body. In the eyes of the Cathars, this world was past all possible redemption, and their belief implied in theory that profane love is absolute misfortune, an impossible and blamable attachment to an imperfect creature. In the eyes of the Christian, on the other hand, divine love is a misfortune also, since man in his fallen state is unable to love God fully in return, but it is a misfortune which nevertheless creates man anew, and which, far from being antagonistic to profane love, results in making this love holy through marriage. Accordingly, the mystic lovers in the Romance are compelled to pursue the *intensification* of passion, not its fortunate appeasement. The keener their passion, and the more it can detach them from created things, the more readily do they feel that they are on the way to attaining the death in *endura* which they desire. But by Christian mystics, on the contrary, the reality of the mystical state is subjected to the test of the deeds and works that issue from it.<sup>1</sup> At least, such has been the constant intention of those mystics who concentrated their prayers upon the truly incarnated Christ. The 'Perfect', however, did not believe in the Incarnation, and could not be aware of the *return* of the soul to a life renewed. 'I die of not being able to die', Saint Teresa says; but she means that she is not able to die to the old life enough to become alive in the new, and thus to obey without anguish.

Where the two forms of mysticism differ most is as regards *humility*. And there again the key to the antithesis lies in the mystery of the Incarnation. The Romance is steeped in the Celtic atmosphere of knightly *pride*. The

<sup>1</sup> Saint Teresa says: 'In order to please God, and in order to receive great benefits from Him, these benefits must—such is His will—pass *through the hands* of holy mankind in whom, as He Himself has said, He finds His satisfaction.'

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high deeds which Tristan performs are inspired by a desire to be valiant. Like all passionate people, he' foolhardily revels in the sense of power which comes over him in moments of peril. Hence ultimately he grows to want danger for its own sake, to want to experience passion for a never-ending passion, and to desire an irrevocable death. At this extreme prowess appears as the material sign of a process of *divinization*. True mystics, on the contrary, are the very essence of prudence, rigour, and clear-sighted obedience. If 'death is my gain', it is because 'Christ is my life' and because Christ was incarnated—that is, came down to us. That is why a Christian does not fall into the delusion of supposing that death for the sake of love can transfigure him; instead he accepts the limitations of his terrestrial vocation. 'Nothing impels him upward, nothing draws him downward', Saint John of the Cross said, and this '*because he places himself at the centre of his humility.*'

### III

## ORTHODOX MYSTICISM AND THE LANGUAGE OF PASSION

The whole of European poetry has come out of courtly love and out of the Arthurian romances derived from this love. That is why our poetry employs a pseudo-mystical vocabulary, from which, quite inconsequently, persons in love still draw to-day their most commonplace metaphors. Yet even as the romantic myth had made use of a stock of imagery, names, and situations taken out of the accumulations of Celtic religion—that is to say, a religion already dead—so our literature and our passions now ignorantly and pervertedly employ a terminology which mysticism alone invested with a valid meaning.

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Once the mysteries had been forgotten, it was inevitable that readers of the Romance should interpret its too skilful allegories as applying to profane life. The modern mind has supposed that the transposition thus effected—after the twelfth century—could serve as a primary *datum*. It has supposed that it could ‘explain’ the higher by the lower—unalloyed mysticism by human passion. And so it founded a new ‘science’, which was based on the study of language in general and on the similarity of metaphors in particular. But where did the metaphors originate? In a kind of mysticism which, as I have shown, was disguised, persecuted, and then forgotten. So thoroughly was it forgotten as heresy and so completely did it pass into everyday use through poetry that the Christian mystics took up its metaphors as if these had been *natural*. And we to-day have done likewise, and so have our men of learning. *The ‘science’ is therefore valid on condition the signs are changed in every one of its statements.* For instance, where the science speaks of mysticism as having resulted from a sublimation of instinct, it is enough to change the direction of the relation stated, and to write: The ‘instinct’ in question is the result of the profanation of an early form of mysticism.

But the modern mind is so reluctant to accept this conversion that I had better go into the matter further. The central event in the world from the standpoint of every kind of religious life that is Christian in content and in form must be the Incarnation. To shift however little from this centre is to run either into humanism or into idealism. The Catharist heresy idealized the whole of the Gospel, and treated love in all its forms as a leap out of the created world. The craving for this flight into the divine—or *enthusiasm*—and for this ultimately impracticable transgression of human limitations, was bound to find expression, and thereby to betray itself fatally, through the magnification in divine terms of sexual love. Conversely, the most ‘Christocentric’ mystics have had a propensity to address

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God in the language of human feeling—the language of sexual attraction, of hunger and thirst, and of the will. This is a magnification in human terms of the love of God.

In this way we become aware of the two great watersheds into which all mysticism divides. Neither is commonly met with unalloyed. Even in the truest representatives of one or the other, both may be discerned, if only because temptation coincides in a believer with the will to obedience. Historically speaking, it is not very easy to isolate either. But theologically the position is clear. The first watershed is *unitive mysticism*, which aims at a complete fusion of the soul with the divine. The second watershed may be called *epithalamic mysticism*, which aims at the *marriage* of a soul to God, and which therefore implicitly maintains an essential distinction between creature and Creator.

It will make for clearness while avoiding an excessive simplification if I take a few individual examples—the only examples worth while in this domain.<sup>1</sup> We shall thereby obtain some insight into the causes of the curious fact *that the misuse of the language of love by religious writers must be linked, from a historical standpoint, with the orthodox watershed.*

The first example I take from Rudolf Otto, who in his book *West-Östliche Mystik*<sup>2</sup> first compares the founder of German mysticism in the fourteenth century, Master Eckhart, with the Hindu mystic Sankara, and then contrasts them. The interesting thing for my present purpose is that Otto distinguishes East and West by calling these two forms of mysticism respectively eros and agape, rather

<sup>1</sup> For indeed generalizations are nowhere more misleading than in connexion with the mystics. In *St. Jean de la Croix et l'expérience mystique* (Paris, 2nd ed., 1931), Jean Baruzi admirably remarks that if we attempted to take a general view of the various forms of mysticism known to us, 'the mystical experience would seem homogeneous only in so far as it is commonplace and in so far as we failed to apprehend its nature.'

<sup>2</sup> Gotha, 1929.

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in the way I have done *supra*.<sup>1</sup> Sankara, according to Otto, rejects the world and condemns it beyond appeal. *Nirvana*, Sankara said, cannot accept *sansara*, which is life in its diversity and infinite flux. Eckhart, on the contrary, discerns the presence of God in every creature, so that through the soul of a believer all creatures 'pass from their existence into their being'. It has been possible for Otto to carry out his comparison, because in the Middle Ages in Europe there existed a mystical tradition akin to Sankara's. It was, Otto says,<sup>2</sup> 'a mysticism of exaggerated emotion where the "I" and the "Thou" flow together in a unity of intoxicated feeling. Eckhart knows nothing of such emotional orgies or such a "pathological" love (as Kant calls it). For him love is not *erōs* but the Christian virtue of *agápē*, strong as death but no paroxysm, inward but of deep humility, at once active in willing and doing as Kant's "practical" love.

'Here Eckhart differs completely from Plotinus, though he is always represented as his pupil. Plotinus also is the publisher of a mystical love, but his love is throughout not Christian *agápē*, but the Greek *erōs*, which is enjoyment, and enjoyment of a sensual and supersensual beauty arising from an aesthetic experience almost unknown to Eckhart. In its finest sublimation it still bears within it something of the *erōs* of Plato's Symposium: that great Daemon, which is purified into a divine passion out of the ardor of procreation, yet even then still retains a sublimated element of the original passion.'

For Eckhart, the true mystic way is not that which ascends from an emotional state in order to reach supreme union at the summit of a love ecstasy. 'Minne einigt nicht', he writes, 'Sie einigt wohl an einem Werk, nicht an einem Wesen.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Book II, §4.

<sup>2</sup> *Mysticism East and West*, translated by Bertha L. Bracey and Richenda C. Payne (New York and London, 1932), p. 212.

<sup>3</sup> 'Love does not unify; it unites all right in act, never to an essence.'

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'Rather the 'at-one-ment [i.e. union] [Otto continues] is itself the condition and the first ground of the possibility of true agápē. Nor has his agápē anything in common with the Platonic or Plotinian erōs, but it is the pure Christian emotion in its elemental chastity and simplicity without exaggeration or admixture.'<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, I myself feel that it is a communion rather than a union; for, as Eckhart expresses it elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> when 'the soul escapes from its nature, its being and its life, and is born into the Divinity, no distinction remains but this: the Divinity is still God, and the soul is still a soul'. The spiritual act of love is initial, not final. A Christian holds that to die to self is the beginning of a more real life here below, not the ruin of the world. Moreover, Otto quotes a further passage from Eckhart which does not refer to union, but to an equality of the soul with God. 'Und diese Gleichheit aus dem Einen in das Eine mit dem Einen ist Quell und Ursprung der aufblühenden glühenden Liebe.'<sup>3</sup> Otto finds this passage to confirm how for Eckhart 'the proper expression of the feeling of at-one-ness is not a mystical *pleasure*, but agápē, a love of a kind which neither Plotinus nor Sankara mentions or knows.'<sup>4</sup>

It would thus seem that Otto succeeds in plainly defining two *poles* of universal mysticism, and that the East (Sankara, Plato, Plotinus) differs from the West (here typified by Eckhart) in the very way I have been saying that Catharist mysticism is to be distinguished from the Christian doctrine of love. But Eckhart, it must be recognized,

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 213.

<sup>2</sup> At the end of the sermon, *Nisi granum frumenti*. It must be admitted that there is an elusive ambiguity about Eckhart's use of the word 'union' (*Einung*), and yet it would seem clear enough from the passage I quote here that Otto is right and that he believed in no essential fusion.

<sup>3</sup> 'And this identity out of the One into the One with the One is fount and source of a flowering glowing love.'

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 214.

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did not dwell in the odour of sanctity. The Avignon pope, John XXII,<sup>1</sup> in a bull issued in 1329, went the length of condemning several of his theses. Among these the tenth is stated in the bull to read as follows:

‘We become completely changed into God and are converted into Him even as the bread is changed into the body of Christ in the sacrament: I am thus changed into Him because He Himself makes me become His. Unity and not similitude. By the living God, it is true that there is then no longer any distinction.’

As extracted from Eckhart’s writings, this thesis seems expressly to contradict Otto’s interpretation. It puts Master Eckhart in the Eastern camp, making out that his mysticism aspires after an *essential* union and so is heretical. Certainly the Flemish mystics vigorously attacked Eckhart’s writings on those very heads regarding which he seems to Otto to have been orthodox—essential union and the neglect of works. Every one must stand to the East of somebody else, and Master Eckhart evidently represented the heresy I am calling ‘eastern’ in the opinion of Ruysbroek. Ruysbroek, in his *Book of the Twelve Beguines*, refers to Eckhart—who had been his own master—and to Eckhart’s faithful disciples as ‘those false prophets’ who ‘imagine that they partake of God by their nature’. ‘These persons who want to be not only God’s equals, but God Himself, are more wicked and diabolical than Lucifer and his satellites.’ Ruysbroek himself did not believe that all distinction between the soul and God can be abolished. The soul cannot train itself to partake of the Divine, but only to resemble God. It can behold God in the *mirror* of a spirit that has been entirely purified. ‘The abyss separating us from God is one’, he says, ‘which we perceive in the secret places of the self. It is essential distance.’

This brings me to the point I wish to set forth. If it is

<sup>1</sup> Himself a heretic, it may be mentioned incidentally.—Translator.

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believed possible for the soul to achieve essential union with God, then the soul's love of God becomes a happy love. It may be expected to display no need of the vocabulary of passion, and this is indeed what History shows. 'I fancy', the Abbé Paquier writes,<sup>1</sup> 'that the Eckhartian mystics never resort to the language of human love.' On the contrary, if it is believed, in accordance with Christian orthodoxy, that the soul cannot achieve essential union with God, the soul's love of God becomes, in the strictest sense, an *unhappy mutual love*. It may then be expected to express itself in passionate language, in the vocabulary of the Catharist heresy as this has become 'profaned' by literature and been taken over by human passions. For the rhetoric of the heresy is the best fitted to describe and communicate the altogether ineffable nature of the emotion experienced. Here again the documentary evidence supports and makes clear the apparent paradoxes of my outline. It is Ruysbroek who with his doctrine of an essential distinction introduces into the writings of the mystics of the North the 'epithalamic' vocabulary.

'Here then the irresistible desire has come [he says]. To compel oneself continually to seize what cannot be seized. . . . And the object of this desire can be neither given up nor seized.<sup>2</sup> To give it up is unbearable, to retain it impossible. Silence itself lacks the strength to grasp it in its hands.' Ruysbroek pours into his glowing style all the metaphors of passionate love. He speaks of being submerged in love, of swooning away, of embraces and of hurricanes of eager-

<sup>1</sup> Cit. apud Baruzi, *St. Jean de la Croix*, p. 642. The absence of 'epithalamic' expressions may possibly serve as a criterion for deciding whether or not a given mystic believed in essential union, and in that case Abbé Paquier's remark goes against Otto's contention: we are led to put Eckhart among the heretics. Obviously I am simplifying matters, but the question is one worth examining closely.

<sup>2</sup> One of the troubadours says: 'Love neither forsakes me nor can it really take me.'



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ness, of the fire of love that burns the soul day and night, of orgies of love, overflowing delights, of being intoxicated with love, and of love's bruising. 'He has drunk up my spirit and my heart', Ruysbroek causes one of his beguines to say in referring to Christ. 'I have become lost in his mouth', another says. And a third declares: 'Oh, to drink in the glances of love and to be engulfed in them intoxicated!'

In the thirteenth century the Franciscan mystics supply a no less striking instance of the use of courtly terminology. Saint Francis himself, it is well known, learned French in his youth, and delighted in French tales of chivalry. He dreamed of becoming 'the finest knight in the world', or, in his own words, 'a great baron adored by all the world'. It will be remembered that he began his ministry by removing his clothes in the presence of the bishop and of a great crowd assembled in the main square of Assisi. When he was quite naked, he said to his richly attired father that henceforth his only father would be God. The bishop threw his cloak over Francis, who fled into the countryside declaiming verses in French in a loud voice. He felt that the utter destitution of his body had made it the humble servant of his soul. Thereupon there was nothing to hamper his ascent towards the Supreme Good. Remembering the French romances he had read, Francis made Poverty his 'Lady', and deemed it an honour to be her 'knight'.

The Franciscan wandering knights spread over Italy as the troubadours had spread over the South of France. They were to be met with on the roads and in market places, and from village to castle. The poems of Jacopone da Todi—'God's juggler'—the lauds of his imitators, the letters of Saint Catherine of Siena, the Book of the Blessed Angela di Foligno, and the many tales of the Fioretti,<sup>1</sup> show that the

<sup>1</sup> Saint Francis called Friar Giles 'a paladin of the Round Table', and the saint's *miracles*—such as the conversion of the Gubbio wolf—occurred in the same circumstances as did the feats of *prowess* of the wandering knights.

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rhetoric of the troubadours and of the courtly romances was the direct inspiration of the Franciscan poetic impulse, which in turn deeply influenced the mystical vocabulary of subsequent centuries.

‘Remember, O creature, that thy nature partaketh of the angels. Dost thou tarry in this mud, and thou shalt have to stay for ever in darkness.’

So one of the lauds attributed to Jacopone da Todi and his followers; and the suggestion in this passage that men are in some way angels disturbingly recalls the doctrine of the Cathars. Other lauds, while obviously more Catholic in their inspiration, are for that reason only the more ‘erotic’ and ‘courtly’ in phraseology. For example:

‘My heart melteth like ice on fire when I straitly embrace my Lord, and cry: “The love of Love consumeth me, I am united with Love, intoxicated by love.”

‘In flames I burn and languish, crying: “In living I die, and in dying I live. Yet do I not love, but am athirst for love; I hunger to be united with Love.”’<sup>1</sup>

## IV

### COURTLY RHETORIC IN SPANISH MYSTICISM

If now we turn to the writings of the great Spanish mystics of the sixteenth century, Saint Teresa and Saint John of the Cross, we find them employing the whole rhetoric of courtly love, even its most delicate shades of expression. Here are the chief topics common alike to the troubadours and to these orthodox mystics:

<sup>1</sup> From *Ciascun amante*, described as ‘a dance of mystic love’.

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'To die of not being able to die.'<sup>1</sup>

The 'sweet cautery'.

'Love's dart' that wounds but does not kill.

The 'salute' of love.

Passion that sets one apart from the world and other beings.

Passion that renders every other kind of love colourless.

To complain of an ill that is yet prized more than every joy and worldly good.

To deplore that words should betray an 'ineffable' emotion which nevertheless demands to be avowed.

Love as a purifying emotion that drives away all vile thoughts.

The substitution of the will of love for the real will.

The 'struggle of love' in which it is needful to be defeated.

The symbolism of 'castles' as havens of love.

The symbolism of the 'mirror' for imperfect love reflecting perfecting love.

The 'stolen heart', the 'ravished understanding', the 'rape of love'.

Love treated as an ultimate 'understanding' (*conoscenza* in Provençal).

All this kind of thing has led the materialist psychologist—from Voltaire to Freud—to declare with odd assurance, and purely on verbal grounds, that mystics are the victims of a sexual aberration. And, as is well known, the views put forth by the learned in the nineteenth century have now become the prepossessions of the vulgar. However, not only is the materialistic attitude to mysticism clearly more indicative of an obsession in those who cling to it than enlightening about mysticism itself, but also it is an attitude

<sup>1</sup> This famous exclamation of Saint Teresa's was inspired by the Franciscan Angela di Foligno, who said: 'I die of a desire to die!'

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based upon an error at once historical and psychological. For (a) the language of passion, as the mystics employ it, has not been to begin with the language of the senses and of nature, but the rhetoric of an *askesis* closely allied to the twelfth-century heresy of Southern France; and (b) geniuses such as Saint John of the Cross and Saint Teresa must have been more alive than any one else to the perils of 'spiritual luxuriousness' (the expression is Saint John's), and both speak of it so freely that in their case the usual suspicion of an 'inhibition' must be meaningless.

These two points deserve to be elaborated. In the first place, it needs to be insisted that the language of the mystics is not open to being confused with the profound nature of the experiences they underwent. J. Baruzi writes of Saint Teresa that 'the source of many of her images has been traced, but it is not so easy to find the origins of the psychological language in which she undoubtedly most truly expressed her nature'. All mystics, and Saint Teresa as much as any of them, complain of a want of new words (*nuevas palabras*) with which to praise the works of God as they experience these in spirit. Their silence is *truer* than their speech. The only thing I wish to do here is to consider the *inherited material* of their literary vocabulary.

To confine myself to an instance which is at one and the same time the most celebrated, the best known, and that which has most strikingly misled the authorities, the fact is that Saint Teresa constantly employs and even refines upon courtly rhetoric. Is this a matter of literary influence? Of some underground heretical connexion? Or even of an independent re-creation which might be partly accounted for on the lines of remarks made in the preceding section? 'How can we tell', Baruzi says, 'whether some of the images which John of the Cross takes from the Song of Songs were extracted directly from the Biblical poem or were not at the same time images which he rediscovered and, so to speak, verified for himself, because they ex-

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pressed a newly experienced delight?'<sup>1</sup> These are questions which I do not believe any one is equipped to settle. The best informed specialists hesitate over attributing to very famous—and, as it happens, orthodox—mystics, such as Ruysbroek or Saint Teresa, the originating of the actual terminology used by Saint John of the Cross. As regards Saint Teresa, however, we may trace unmistakable sources. The fondness shown by the mystics for the romances of chivalry has often been pointed out. Saint Teresa in her girlhood doted upon them.<sup>2</sup> It seems even that she once thought of writing a romance herself in collaboration with her brother Rodriguez. It is also well known that the religious writings which were her intellectual nourishment were all the work of authors strongly imbued with courtly and chivalric rhetoric. M. Gaston Etchegoyen says:<sup>3</sup>

'The noble language of *Amadis of Gaul*, its erotic metaphors, and its subtle refinements, are found also in Francisco de Ossuna and Bernardino de Laredo [writers whom Saint Teresa made her masters] as well as in the *Exclamaciones* and the *Castillo interior*.

'In Spain the authors of romances of chivalry display a same realism with those of treatises on mysticism, sacrificing a sense of the marvellous in favour of a more familiar and moving intimacy, as they tend to treat the human and the divine on one plane, either *by contemplating the divine from a secular standpoint or by giving the human a divine interpretation*.

'Above all, courtly and divine love encourage one another to a like heroic notion of moral obligation, of action, and of faith. Amadis of Gaul and Saint Teresa could both have taken for their motto: "To love in order to

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 343.

<sup>2</sup> Vide her *Vida*, cap. II.

<sup>3</sup> *L'Amour divin: essai sur les sources de sainte Tèrese* (Paris, 1923), Part IV.

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act." [Although courtly love, in its pristine purity, loved in order to suffer, in order 'to endure'.]

'A fusion of divine and courtly love was effected, not in the feeble extravagances of the romances of mystic chivalry, but by the twelfth-century troubadours of Provence. The most fecund material in their doctrine, and in their symbolism and terminology, was taken over by mysticism in the thirteenth century thanks to St. Francis of Assisi.

'Considering St. Teresa alone, we see that the romances of chivalry had a psychological influence upon her, and also a literary influence which is chiefly evident in the warlike symbolism of the *Castillo interior*.'

What an extraordinary return and incorporation of heresy by means of a rhetoric which it had devised for use against the Church, and which the Church, thanks to the saints, eventually wrested from it! Let me summarize the stages of the process. The heresy of the 'Perfect' is brought down from Eros to Venus and goes so far as to be identified with a poetry of love apparently altogether secular; in this disguise it is hoped that the doctrine will escape persecution and that the sworn 'secret' will be preserved; but the stratagem overreaches its mark. The vocabulary of the love poetry has an irresistible appeal to natural desires, so that little by little the heresy vanishes from before the eyes of the worldly whom the deceptive charms of art have taken in, and they treat the language as simply poetry. Finally, first a hundred and then another three hundred years later, nobody remembers that the garment was ever meant to cover anything but nature, and Christian mysticism comes along in order to make it into a cloak for agape!

The partiality of the Christian mystics for the terminology of passion has generally been interpreted psychologically according to the materialistic superstition.<sup>1</sup> Everything possible—and indeed rather more than everything

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the writings of Max Nordau, Krafft-Ebing, Murisier, Leuba, Freud, &c.

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possible—has been attributed to a ‘deflexion’ of sexual instinct. On the whole, the nineteenth century never felt greater self-satisfaction than when equating the superior with the inferior, the mental with the material, and the significant with the insignificant. It called this ‘explaining’. There is no need to demonstrate that most of the time it was merely casting its critical sense to the winds. But I may remark that its propensity in this direction may well testify to some deep *resentment* felt at poetry and indeed at all creative—and hence venturesome—activity of the mind.

## V

### A NOTE ON METAPHOR

However, the matter may be carried further. It is possible to say: ‘Let us grant that the language of passion was derived from Catharist mystical doctrine. But did not this doctrine in turn arise out of sublimated physiological proclivities?’ *Historically*, the question has nothing to go on; and yet theoretically the objection is possible and even inevitable. But to ask if ‘mind’ or ‘matter’ is the ultimate *cause* of phenomena involving both is like asking: ‘Which came first, the hen or the egg?’ For example, we are quite unable to tell whether the language of mysticism resulted from a materialization of the mental—in which event the latter would be a first cause—or on the contrary from a sublimation of physiological phenomena—in which case these phenomena must underlie what is being expressed. But one thing is certain: we are confronted with two factors which never exist singly. That should content everybody, although in fact it contents no one.

Metaphor, indeed, affords another instance of that eagerness of the contemporary mind to settle a question in favour

## A NOTE ON METAPHOR

of whatever is lower. We speak of a *bitter* taste, and also of a *bitter* pain. This everybody is ready to explain by saying that to speak of a bitter pain is to use a metaphor and to give the epithet a figurative sense. The *real* meaning of the word 'bitter' is made a physical sensation, which is thus held to have preceded any mental one. Very possibly, but actually we do not know. It is impossible for anybody who thinks that the physical came first to give *reasons* for his opinion. Nobody has found out that the 'material' meaning of every word has actually preceded the 'mental' meaning. The opinion that it has is merely based on a presumption—that the physical is *more true and more real* than the mental, and hence that the physical is at the foundation of all things and is the principle of all *explanation*.

But it is wiser to suppose that both the literal and the figurative senses of a word express each in their respective departments an indivisible reality, both more profound and anterior to either its sensorial or mental aspects. Actually, a pain may be no less bitter than the taste of salt, and what we denote by the same word in each case is a way of being affected—whether by the senses or by a thought—in the whole of our existence.<sup>1</sup> Likewise with our metaphors of love. People nowadays boldly argue as follows: 'To me *love* means sexual attraction. St. Teresa everlastingly talks about love. Ergo, this mystic was an erotomaniac un-awares.' But Saint Teresa remained unaware of nothing. Where is the inhibition, where the censor, when in reply to a religious who complains that he feels his senses being stirred each time he begins to pray, she writes: 'I find that this has nothing to do with prayer, and that the best thing is to ignore it'?

'It will perhaps seem to you [she writes on another occasion] that some of the matters met with in the Song of Songs could have been put otherwise. In view of our

<sup>1</sup> Vide E. Minkowski, *Vers une cosmologie* (Paris, 1936) and A. Dandieu and R. Aron, *La Révolution nécessaire* (Paris, 1933).



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grossness, I shall not be surprised if this is what you have felt. I have even heard persons say that they avoided attending to such matters. O Lord! how great is our wretchedness! We behave like venomous animals that turn all they eat into poison.'

But if Saint Teresa remained unaware of nothing, it is quite likely that 'passionate lovers' are mystics without knowing it. So the arguments cancel out. We know nothing whatever about primary origins. All that can be set forth here is the interplay of the two factors in their historical evolution.

A mystic wishing to describe his ineffable experiences was compelled to use metaphors, although able of course to inflect their meaning. At the beginning of the twelfth century the metaphors of courtly rhetoric became those of every day; and this rhetoric, be it remembered, was highly ambiguous, for it had obtained from Manichaean dogma symbols of sexual attraction. In taking over such metaphors the mystics were not in the least 'sublimating' sensual passions; it simply happened that the habitual way of describing these passions—which had themselves been given literary shape by another form of mysticism—was also suited to describing the spiritual love they had experienced. The metaphors were the more appropriate to describing the 'unhappy' relations between a soul and its God that they had been 'humanized'—that is to say, detached from heresy. For heresy had assumed the possibility of the union and fusion of the soul with God, a possibility implying a divine happiness and the unhappiness of all love between human beings; whereas orthodoxy looked on union with the divine as impossible, and in doing so implied a divine unhappiness and made human love possible within this love's own limitations. It follows that the language of human passion as this passion was viewed by heresy corresponded to the language of divine passion as this in turn was viewed by orthodoxy. Hence there was a continuous interaction, and it is something altogether arbi-

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trary to isolate this or that moment and give it the guise of a primary *datum*.

### VI

## THE MYSTIC DELIVERANCE

The time has come for us to be arbitrary in this way and to decide the question in favour of the mental—that is to say, in favour of the primacy of mind. Whether arbitrary *ante* or *post rem*—and in this case there is no real difference—the decision can nevertheless be justified by arguments. In the first place, it seems to me that the language of passion can be accounted for on the view that mind comes before matter because it expresses, not the triumph of nature over mind,<sup>1</sup> but an encroachment of mind over instinct. ‘There is love whenever desire is so great as to go beyond the confines of natural love’, the troubadour Guido Calvacanti declared in the thirteenth century; and it is in his transcending the confines of instinct that man is set up as mind. This is alone what enables human beings to speak. For language offers the possibility of lying *as much as* the possibility of stating what is. Animals cannot lie; they are unable to state what instinct does not supply; they cannot go beyond necessity or beyond satisfaction. But passion—the love of love—is, on the contrary, an urge going beyond instinct and thereby it *gives* instinct *the lie*. In such circumstances the lie can only be uttered by mind.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As is implied in such an everyday expression as ‘blinded by passion’ or ‘madly in love’.

<sup>2</sup> How deeply are statement and lying bound together in passionate love! Indeed, the will to expression, the will to self-description, as if in order to obtain a more intense self-enjoyment, is typical of all passion. And it also implies the conviction that other people must fail to understand, and that if they question or accuse us they must be lied to for the sake of preserving the very essence of passion.

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Secondly, if Saint John of the Cross, and even Ruysbroek and Saint Francis, obviously appeared later than the moment at which passionate love flowered into consciousness, this moment is in turn later than the pseudo-Christian mysticism of the Cathars.

And, thirdly, it has probably been a mistake to suppose that the proposition, 'Every erotomaniac is a mystic un-awares', can be countered by the statement, 'Or the other way round'. The *epigoni* of the great mystics may sometimes seem to us as if they had been erotomaniacs un-awares.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, erotomania is unquestionably a kind of drugged state, and everything goes to show that Eckhart, Ruysbroek, Teresa, and John of the Cross were the exact opposite of any drug-taker. For a drug-taker is the victim not of his passion but of the material means which he employs in order to obtain his transports. Although a drug-taker's passion may have originated in a conscious or unconscious desire to escape from an intolerable terrestrial confinement, it remains that he is first and foremost the slave of his drug. Psychologically speaking, he is a fallen being, whose senses are deadened, whose mind has become clouded, and who ends up in idiocy. But the great mystics, on the contrary, urge the need of pushing beyond the trance stage and of reaching a clarity of mind ever purer and more daring, and even of verifying the high gifts of grace by means of their repercussions *in everyday life*. Saint Teresa deemed good only those visions that impelled her to act better and to love more. Above all, the great mystics are agreed in seeing at the summit of their ascent the attainment of a sovereign freedom of the soul. Saint John of the Cross and Master Eckhart say in different words the same thing: a mystic should strive after attaining a state in which he is able 'to forgo his gift' and

<sup>1</sup> Especially the female *epigoni*, such as Marguerite Marie Alacoque in the seventeenth century, who so vividly describes the nuptial bed and what takes place in it!

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to desire it no longer for its own sake. In spiritual marriage, according to John of the Cross, a soul comes to love God without any longer *feeling* its love. It might seem as if this were a state of perfect indifference; actually, it is the perfect state of hard-won poise and of immediately active understanding. On the far side of trances and *askesis*, the mystic experience culminates in a state of the most thorough 'disintoxication' of the soul and of the utmost self-possession. And only then does *marriage* become possible, meaning as it must, not the enjoyment of eros, but the fecundity of agape.

Thus ultimately orthodox mysticism stands forth as the highest way of purgation and as the most effective discipline for transcending passionate love, even when in a sublimated form. The cycle of Christian *askesis* leads the soul back to happy obedience, to acceptance of creature limitations, albeit with a spirit renewed and with a freedom regained.

The history of passionate love in all great literature from the thirteenth century down to our own day is the history of the descent of the courtly myth into 'profane' life, the account of the more and more desperate attempts of Eros to take the place of mystical transcendence by means of emotional intensity. But magniloquent or plaintive, the tropes of its passionate discourse and the hues of its rhetoric can never become more than the glow of a resurgent twilight and the promise of a phantom bliss.



*Book Four*

*The Myth in Literature*



# I

## OF THE INFLUENCE OF LITERATURE ON CONDUCT

IN a general way it is difficult *to trace* the actual influence of the arts upon the everyday life of a particular period. Does music refine manners? And what may be the effect of painting? Architecture, it is true, produces dwellings, but the fact that its constructions are lived in is not evidence of its artistic influence. As with the arts, so with this or that philosophy. Very different, however, is the situation of a literature which may be shown historically to have bestowed its vocabulary upon passion. If literature can be said to have affected the manners of Europe, the credit is certainly due to our myth. More accurately, it is due to the rhetoric of the myth, as inherited from Provençal love. There is no need to attribute to sounds and words any magical power over our conduct. The adoption of certain linguistic conventions naturally involves and fosters the rise of the latent feelings most apt to be expressed in this way. That is the sense in which it may be said, following La Rochefoucauld, that few people would fall in love had they never heard of love.

Passion and expression are not to be isolated from one another. Passion comes to birth in that powerful impetus of the mind which also brings language into existence. So soon as passion goes beyond instinct and becomes truly itself, it tends to self-description, either in order to justify or intensify its being, or else simply in order to keep *going*. In this sphere, tracing the process is easy. The emotions first experienced by an upper class and then through imitation by the masses are literary creations in the sense that



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a given rhetoric is the sufficient condition for them to be *avowed* and hence for them to become conscious. In the absence of this rhetoric the emotions would no doubt still exist, but accidentally, lacking recognition, and they would be treated as unmentionable and contraband peculiarities. But it has invariably happened that the putting into circulation of a new rhetoric caused neglected potentialities of the heart suddenly to become profusely actualized. The publication of *Werther*, for example, led to a wave of suicides. Rousseau made the whole of the French court take to drinking milk. Chateaubriand's *René* filled several generations with melancholy. This is because in order to admire nature unadorned, to adopt a certain gloomy mien, or even to commit suicide, it is necessary to be able 'to explain', either to oneself or to others, what one is feeling. The more emotional a man is, the more likely is he to be wordy and to speak well. Likewise, the more passionate a man is, the more likely is he to re-invent the tropes of the rhetoric, to rediscover their *necessity*, and to shape himself spontaneously according to the notion of the 'sublime' which these tropes have indelibly impressed upon us.

That is why it will be easy enough to mark the stages of the transformation undergone by the courtly myth in the *morals* of the peoples of Europe. It can be taken for granted that, except of course for certain delays and simplifications, these stages have kept pace with the *literary* transformations to which over the same lapse of time the myth was being subjected. In describing the sweep of classical mysticism, I was able to note the moment of the myth's incorporation. The sweep was an ascending one, and led to a release through the snapping of the spell. Literature, on the contrary, is the way downward to manners. Hence it is the popularization of the myth—or better still, its 'profanation'<sup>1</sup>—that I am now going to survey.

<sup>1</sup> This word I am invariably using in the two senses of 'sacrilege' and of 'secularization'.

## THE TWO ROSES

### II

## THE TWO ROSES

The best starting-point is supplied by the *Roman de la Rose*, written between 1237 and 1280, about a century after Bérout and Thomas had produced their versions of *Tristan*. The Albigensian crusade had devastated the courtly civilization of Languedoc and scattered the last of the troubadours. What happened to the tradition of Love? It seems clear that as early as the middle third of the century the heretics—now being hunted by the Church and dispersed all over Europe—forsook giving literary expression to their faith. Catharism was henceforth to be buried in the deep and dumb layers of the people, whose social life precluded noble ceremonial so that the magnificent symbols of the great age of feudalism were no longer available. The apparent silence, however, did not halt its progress. The Church of Love<sup>1</sup> was reproduced in countless sects more or less secret and more or less revolutionary, and their close similarity of feature testifies to a common origin and to a tradition faithfully preserved. In fact, all these sects denied the dogma of the Trinity—at least in its orthodox form; all evinced a high-flown spirituality; all professed a doctrine of ‘radiant joy’; all were anticlerical, cultivated poverty and vegetarianism, and displayed an egalitarian spirit, extending in some instances to complete communism.<sup>2</sup> Presently these same features were likewise being

<sup>1</sup> From this stage onwards the symbol of the whole opposition between the orthodox and heterodox Churches was given by the name of love itself. Confronting the Church of Rome, *Roma*, was the Church of Love, *Amor*, and the latter accused the former of having diabolically inverted the name of divine love and of having made of the Gospel an excuse for slaughtering the ‘Pure’.

<sup>2</sup> I have perhaps not mentioned that the chivalry of Southern love differed above all from feudal chivalry in the fact that any

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displayed all together among the Brethren of the Free Spirit and the Rhenish Ortliebians—who were perhaps in touch with the Waldenses, neighbours of the Cathars—and not only among the Waldenses themselves, but also among the disciples of Joachim de Flore, among the beguines and beghards of the Low Countries, the English Lollards, the Moravian Brethren (if not among the Hussites); and, further, among the heretics of the Reformed Churches—Schwenckfeldt, Weigel, the Anabaptists and the Mennonites. Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli fought these dissenters with the same violence that Rome had employed against its own sectarians. But they could not and did not wish to wipe them out entirely. Nowadays Mennonite communities in which Russian strains have mingled—Dukhobors and Khlystis—exist as far afield as Canada and Paraguay. Their notion of love has not changed.

At the same time as the Cathars were being scattered, courtly literature became detached from its mystic roots. Before the middle of the thirteenth century it had turned into simply a means of expression—a rhetoric. But this rhetoric tended automatically *to idealize* the profane objects it dealt with. As soon as this tendency made itself felt, it excited, as it was bound to do, a so-called ‘realistic’ reaction. The double movement finds its illustrious witness in the *Roman de la Rose*, which was written in two parts, each by a different author. The first part, produced in about 1237, was the work of Guillaume de Lorris; the second part, by Jean de Meung, was finished before 1280.

The Rose of Guillaume de Lorris is love of the ideal woman, by now a real woman and yet inaccessible in her garden frosted over with allegories. Danger, Male-

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man, whether burgess or serf, could accede to it by means of ‘poetry’ alone. Countless documents show that in the eyes of the Cathars the troubadour’s is the true nobility, and that in order to be a noble it was enough to know and to practise the *leys d’amor*. Dante later held the same theory.

## SICILY, ITALY, BEATRICE, AND SYMBOLS

Bouche, and Shame defend Bel-Accueil from the boldness of suitors. The *obstruction* to the union of love is figured by a necessity that is now moral and no longer in the least religious. The lover has to deserve his reward, not by any mystical *askesis*, but by a refinement of mind. Jean de Meung, on the other hand, looks upon the Rose as no more than sensual pleasure. A most outspoken realism supersedes Lorris's fiddle-faddle; Platonism gives place to an apology of sensual enjoyment, and emotional fervour to cynicism. The Rose is won by main force. Nature triumphs over Mind; and reason over passion.

Each of the two parts of the Romance had its own progeny. Lorris led to Dante—who perhaps translated him—and on to Petrarch and much further, down to the allegorical novels of the seventeenth century and to *La Nouvelle Héloïse* in the eighteenth. From Jean de Meung the ancient tradition, according to which passion is to be rejected as 'a sickness of the soul', was transmitted to the lower levels of French literature—to *gauloiserie* and the schools of broad Gallic jokes, to controversial rationalism, and to a curiously exacerbated misogyny, naturalism, and man's reduction to sex. All this has simply been pagan man's normal way of defending himself against the myth of unhappy love. Perhaps in effect his attitude has not been so very different from the realistic Christian vision. That, however, is a matter to which I shall return.

### III

## SICILY, ITALY, BEATRICE, AND SYMBOLS

In about the year 1200 Rambaut de Vaqueiras, a troubadour of Languedoc, exchanged some verses with the power-

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ful Marchese Alberto Malaspina. It would seem clear that at this time similar exchanges—call them ‘literary’ if you like—kept the South of France in touch with Lombardy and Venetia. Once again, the map of the influence exerted by the troubadours coincides with the map of heresy. A little later the Franciscan movement arose out of a like conjunction of the ‘spiritualists’—this time, inside the Church—and the poets. Meanwhile, around Palermo, where Frederick the Second held court, there blossomed the so-called Sicilian School. To what extent this courtly poesy of the South was inspired by the troubadours is still obscure. Only one Provençal poet is known to have appeared at the Sicilian court, and Frederick was a persecutor of heresy. It may also be wondered how far the Sicilians still had ‘intelligence of Love’. Was all they had preserved of the *trobar clus* simply the trick of baffling the reader? There is a temptation to think so, in view of the way Dante and his friend Cavalcanti attacked their master, Guittone d’Arezzo, and mocked his disciples, calling them ‘sectarians of ignorance, blind men claiming to distinguish colours, geese striving to rival eagles’.

When Dante comes upon Bonagiunta da Lucca in Purgatory he takes the opportunity of expounding the *dolce stil nuovo*. This was the artful and caressing style in which the Northern School had reacted against the influence of such indefatigable imitators as Bonagiunta. It was novel, but at the same time a return to sound tradition. Its striking feature was its *conscious* renovation of the symbolical vocabulary of the troubadours. The style into which the Sicilians had fallen was a dubiously allegorical one. In treating the Lady as a real woman, they addressed her with a conventional and frigid amorousness. Dante, Cavalcanti, and still others, favoured more spontaneity, more of the ardour of a wooer; but they were nevertheless aware that the Lady was entirely symbolical. Indeed, they were not only aware of it; they said so—and this was their novelty. For such was the paradoxical secret of courtly love: stilted and in-

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animate when addressed to woman, it became all ardent sincerity as soon as it was directed to the Wisdom of Love. Dante is never more passionate than when he refers to Philosophy, unless it is when Philosophy has turned into Holy Knowledge. This sincerity was an unmistakable legacy of the troubadours; and quite the opposite of what it is nowadays supposed to be. In the *Convivio* Dante speaks of it as a secret needing to be veiled in 'a lovely deceit'. This the Cathars had well understood. But it should be borne in mind that they never said so.

It is because Dante and his friends felt that they must *define* their art that, better than any one else, these Italian poets enable us to pierce the real mystery of the troubadours; rather in the way the seven colours of the spectrum can be distinguished at dusk whereas in broad day they form but a single luminousness the very strength of which precludes analysis. It is at this stage of poetry that the themes mingled by the *trobar* in the artless transparency of his symbolism become evident. Jacopo da Lentino, last of the Sicilians, utters the following plaint:

'Oft doth my heart die, and more cruelly than by a natural death, for your sake, Lady, whom it desires and loves more than self. . . .

'I have within me a fire that I feel will never be put out. . . . How is it that this fire consumeth me not?'

Dante too says:<sup>1</sup>

'Love, that discourseth to me in my mind yearningly of my lady, moveth many a time such things with me anent her that my intellect loses its way among them.

'His discourse soundeth so sweetly that the soul that heareth him and feeleth, must cry: "Oh me! that I have not power to tell that which I hear of my lady."'

And the symbolical meaning of the Lady can no longer be in doubt when Guido Guinicelli refers to her as the source of 'our faith':

<sup>1</sup> Canzone III.

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'There goeth she along the road, so filled with nobility and grace that she puts down the pride of him to whom she giveth greeting, and, be he not already of our faith, she doth bring him to it.'

Dante, moreover, can have been no blasphemer when in the *Vita nuova*<sup>1</sup> he penned that verse with its sublime beginning, 'Angelo chiama in divino intelletto':

'An angel crieth in its divine intelligence and saith: "Lord, in the world a marvel is displayed in act, emanating from a soul that shineth afar as here on high. Heaven, that hath no other lack than to possess her, craveth her of its Lord and every saint entreateth the grace. Pity alone defendeth our cause; for God speaketh, intending my lady: Beloved mine, now suffer in peace that your hope be, so long as it pleaseth me, there where is one who looketh to losing her and who in Hell shall say to the damned: "I have beheld the hope of the blessed."'

Can he have been referring to Beatrice as a woman? Is it her presence as such that the saints entreat and that is the hope of the blessed? Or is she the Holy Ghost in the act of upholding His Church with the charity of Christ—Pity—till every soul shall have been able to attain to the New Life?<sup>2</sup> What must seem like blasphemy here below is that the ambiguity is still maintained. That is how there arose a discussion between Orlandi and Cavalcanti about the meaning of their words. 'Is this Love life or death?' the first boldly inquired. 'The power of love often produceth death. . . . There is love whenever desire is so great as to go beyond the confines of natural love. . . . As it is not due to quality, it perpetually reflects its own effect. It is not a

<sup>1</sup> XIX, pp. 34-47.

<sup>2</sup> Beatrice certainly existed, and Dante certainly loved her. Hence here we have a *sublimation*, the opposite of what happened in the case of the troubadours. Beatrice becomes in turn Philosophy, Wisdom, and the Holy Knowledge that shows the way into Paradise and makes intelligible its mysteries.

## SICILY, ITALY, BEATRICE, AND SYMBOLS

pleasure, but a contemplation.' There can be no doubt about it. Love is mystic passion. But the part played by natural love in the heavenly prospect still needed to be made clear. This was done by Davanzati, when, in a little fable written towards the end of the thirteenth century, he described the real nature of the Love he praises and insisted that it is perilous to stop short at the terrestrial forms which are merely its image. He says:

'As a tigress assuageth her cruel pangs by gazing into a mirror wherein seemingly is the image of the whelps she hath been seeking—thanks to this pleasure the hunter is forgotten, and she tarrieth there, and goeth not in pursuit—so he whom love hath penetrated draws in life from beholding his lady, for 'tis thus he doth assuage his heavy affliction. . . . But the lady hath not a kind heart; the day passeth and his hopes are unfulfilled.'

Here, unmistakably, the Lady with the unkind heart is a woman who turns Love to her own advantage. In a moral bestiary belonging to the same period I find the same fable with this ending:

'I trow this beast is ourselves. Her whelps whereof a hunter hath despoiled her are our virtues; and the hunter is the Devil, who maketh us to see that which is not. 'Tis thus that many have perished because they put off going after the Lord.'

The moment was approaching when poets would yield to the spell of the mirror and of profaned rhetoric. Petrarch allowed himself to be snared by 'that which is not', by the image of his Laura, who, as he later lamented, detained him overlong from 'going after the Lord'.



## THE MYTH IN LITERATURE

### IV

## PETRARCH, THE CONVERTED RHETOR

*Cbè mortal cosa amar con tanta fede,  
Quanta a Dio sol per debito conviensi.*

‘Everybody—even the man on some small rock washed by the sea—is aware that the world has witnessed one superlative lover and that this lover was Petrarch. Best of all, it is true. . . . What do we mean by a man *simply* in love? This is nothing of the kind. Petrarch was in love extraordinarily, blazingly, like a very sun.’<sup>1</sup>

That is the astonishing thing about Petrarch! When he described his memorable passion the symbols of the troubadours were quickened for the first time by an entirely pagan breath! Pagan, and not in the least heretical! Petrarch stands at the antipodes not only of Dante, but also of the rhetors whom Dante attacked. The ‘secret’ I spoke of just now had evaporated. It was no longer effective. The language of love had at length become the rhetoric of the heart. For reasons given *supra* (Book III), this ‘radical profanation’ was bound to produce the kind of poetry most suited to serve orthodox mysticism, and it was indeed from this poetry that the mystics in due course drew their finest metaphors. The temptation was irresistible, and a few examples—chosen almost haphazard—will show why.

Here is Petrarch’s sonnet on the first anniversary of his love for Laura:

And still I bless the day, the hour, the place,<sup>2</sup>  
When first so high mine eyes I dared to rear;

<sup>1</sup> C. A. Cingria, *Pétrarque* (Lausanne, 1932).

<sup>2</sup> Sonetto XIII. Translation by Francis Wrangham. Saint Teresa says: ‘These graces are accompanied, so far as the mind is concerned, by a complete detachment from creatures. One then feels far more of a stranger to worldly affairs.’

## PETRARCH, THE CONVERTED RHETOR

And say, 'Fond heart, thy gratitude declare,  
That then thou had'st the privilege to gaze.  
'Twas she inspired the tender thought of love  
Which points to heaven, and teaches to despise  
The earthly vanities that others prize:  
She gave the soul's light grace, which to the skies  
Bids thee straight onward in the right path move;  
Whence buoy'd by hope e'en now I soar to worlds  
above.'

Where Petrarch excels is in taking Tristan's harp<sup>1</sup> and in plucking from it the wail of the 'exquisite anguish', the cherished ill, the delight that is consuming him.

O vivid lustre! of power absolute  
O'er all my being—source of that delight  
By which consumed I sink, a willing prey.<sup>2</sup>

Oh breathing death! yet ill I joy to feel!<sup>3</sup>  
Unsanction'd thus to rule, oh! whence thy art?

. . . . .

Without a helm, upon a swelling sea,  
I feel my fragile bark the wind's poor sport.<sup>4</sup>

We have already met with this bark—on board which, like Tristan, Petrarch has taken his harp with him—and we have also met the 'sway' which he laments while aware that he has willed it fatalistically.

<sup>1</sup> He was acquainted with the Romance and quotes it a number of times. For example, in the *Trionfo d'amore*, he says:

Here be the erring knights in ancient scrolls,  
Lancelot, Tristram, and the vulgar souls  
That wait on these.

<sup>2</sup> Canzone LXXII. Translation by Lady Dacre.

<sup>3</sup> Saint Teresa says: 'It is a torture at once exquisite and cruel.'

<sup>4</sup> Sonetto CXXXII. Translation by Susan Wollaston.

## THE MYTH IN LITERATURE

And thus my martyrdom no limit knows,  
A thousand deaths and lives each day I feel.<sup>1</sup>

Elsewhere he speaks of Laura as his 'beloved enemy', and his lament recalls that of Tristan when giving up Iselt so that she may return to her husband.

O cruel absence! why  
Didst thou remove me from the menaced woes?<sup>2</sup>

For when Laura is near her eyes

inflaming with a light divine  
So burn my heart, I dare no more repine.<sup>3</sup>

But here again woman, whether absent or present, is never but the *occasion* for a torment he cherishes above all else:

I know to follow while I flee my fire:  
I freeze when present; absent, my desire  
Is hot.<sup>4</sup>

All romantic love is summed up in this last line. And how much better does Petrarch dissect the nature of the melancholy than it ever was to be by its most self-conscious victims when in due course it became the *mal du siècle*!

'Often am I assailed by other passions [he says elsewhere],<sup>5</sup> but their assaults are short and passing. At times, however, this ill invades me with an obstinacy that grips and torments me for days and nights on end. The ordeal affords me no ray of light nor tremor of life; it is an in-

<sup>1</sup> Sonetto CLXIV. Translation by R. G. Macgregor. Saint Teresa says: 'The soul . . . would fain have its anguish never end.' Again: 'Once the soul is put to this torture, it would fain pass thus the whole of the life remaining to it.'

<sup>2</sup> Sonetto CCLIV. Translation by R. G. Macgregor.

<sup>3</sup> *Trionfo d'amore*. Translation by Anna Hume. Saint John of the Cross says: 'O sweet cautery!' And cf. his meditation on this line in *The Living Flame of Love*.

<sup>4</sup> Idem.

<sup>5</sup> *Secretum meum* (*De Contemptu mundi*).

## PETRARCH, THE CONVERTED RHETOR

fernal night and a cruel death. And yet—here is what may well be called the height of woe!—I feed on these particular pains and sufferings with a kind of delight so poignant that if I am snatched away from them it is against my will.<sup>1</sup>

And Saint Augustine, with whom on this occasion Petrarch supposes himself to be having a dialogue, is made to reply:

‘Thou knowest full well what ails thee. Presently thou shalt learn its cause. Tell me: Why art thou so sad? Is it really the way of things in the world? A bodily pain? Some unjust stroke of fortune?’

Petrarch says: ‘Nothing in particular of that kind.’ He was experiencing the pre-romantic ‘surge of passion’. And here is the summons to death:

Loose me from forth my darksome prison here,  
That to so glorious life the passage bars.<sup>2</sup>

The ‘infernal night’ has been changed into Day; the ‘cruel death’ into a new Life. And in order that passion shall not lack a touch of the sublime, here also is divinization. Petrarch asks how he can possibly go on living while parted from his lady.

Love’s answer soon the truth forgotten shows—  
‘This high pure privilege true lovers claim,  
Who from mere human feelings franchised are.’<sup>3</sup>

Then there was his famous ascent of Mount Ventoux, which

<sup>1</sup> Saint Teresa says: ‘From this desire which fills the whole soul as in a flash, there arises a pain uplifting the soul above itself and above all created things. The soul but yearns to die in this solitude. If it is then addressed, and although it may strive with all its strength to give answer, its efforts are defeated. Try as it may, it cannot snatch itself out of this solitude.’

<sup>2</sup> Sonetto LXXII. Translation by Lady Dacre.

<sup>3</sup> Sonetto XV. Translation by R. G. Macgregor. Saint Teresa says: ‘How great the sway of a soul uplifted by God Himself to this height, from which it surveys all things but is bound by none!’

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gave him much food for thought. And above all there was the Black Death, which ravaged Europe in 1348, and reminded him that his 'human qualities' bound him to a pitiful state of being. In the *Song of the Great Plague*—a matchless masterpiece of self-examination—he says:

Ceaseless I think, and in each wasting thought<sup>1</sup>  
So strong a pity for myself appears  
That often it has brought  
My harass'd heart to new yet natural tears;  
Seeing each day my end of life draw nigh,  
Instant in pray'r, I ask of God the wings  
With which the spirit springs, " "  
Freed from its mortal coil, to bliss on high;  
But nothing to this hour, pray'r, tear, or sigh,  
Whatever man could do, my hopes sustain.

‘Take up at length, wisely take up your part:  
Tear ev’ry root of pleasure from your heart,  
Which ne’er can make it blest.’

Too long has he pinned his hopes to ‘the false and fugitive sweetness’ of an idealized love.

For o’er my heart from time to time I feel  
A subtle scorn, a lively anguish steal,  
Whence ev’ry hidden thought,  
Where all may see, upon my brow is writ.  
For with such faith on mortal things to dote,  
As unto God alone is just and fit,  
Disgraces worst the prize who covets most.

But how shall he tear out of his heart this blaspheming love,  
this demented desire?

Passion, whose strength I now from habit feel  
So great that it would dare with death itself to deal.

<sup>1</sup> Canzone CCLXIV. Translation by R. G. Macgregor.

## THE INVERTED IDEAL OF 'GAULOISERIE'

The very self-awareness betrayed in such a cry—a cry giving away the ultimate secret of the courtly myth—is the sign that a man has been touched by grace. What can tear out the vain hope is a single-minded faith in forgiveness. And at last converted expectation discovers that to which it is really looking:

'It lifts you now to hope more blest and sweet,  
Uplooking to that heaven around your head,  
Immortal, glorious spread.  
If but a glance, a brief word, an old song,  
Had here such power to charm  
Your eager passion, glad of its own harm,  
How far 'twill then exceed if now the joy so strong.'

## V

## THE INVERTED IDEAL OF 'GAULOISERIE'

The admonitions of Christian teaching gave the pagan Middle Ages an uneasy conscience, and they constantly dreamed of somehow bringing the unruly surge of human passions under the restraint of a set of conventions. This was the secret ambition that produced the myth. But in consequence the spread of the myth inevitably had an unfortunate effect. It caused the faith 'unto God alone just and fit' to get mixed up with doting on 'mortal things'. And it was this confusion, not orthodox doctrine, which set up the tragic antithesis between body and soul. The poesy of *cortezia* had received its inspiration from the Eastern monasticism hails from the East) and heretical disposition to asceticism shown by the 'Perfect'. It is thus clear that what little by little infected the ruling class of medieval

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society by means of a literature of idealization was nothing else than an ascetic ideal. There was bound to be a reaction in the direction of 'realism'; and, as it happens, this reaction was strongest in the middle class. Its beginnings are visible quite early in the twelfth century, in the very hey-day of courtly love. The glorification of wanton indulgence was carried to the same extreme as the glorification of chastity. *Fabliau* contended with poem; shamelessness with idealism. The *Débat de l'âme et du corps*, which belongs to this period, is the first witness to a struggle that the doctrine of Christian marriage was supposed to resolve. A soul just parted from its body assails its erstwhile companion with bitter reproaches, alleging that if it is condemned to damnation the body is to blame. But the body retorts with a *tu quoque* (which has some justification!). So, keeping up their belated recriminations, the two go forward together into everlasting torment.

It was the growing resentment of the body displayed here that inspired the whole of the *fabliaux*, and they met with tremendous success—their readers frequently being the same persons who enjoyed reading idealizing romances. The *fabliaux* were ribald anecdotes hawked about all over medieval Europe and retold with countless variations. They heralded the comic novel, which in turn heralded the novel of manners, which heralded the controversial naturalism of much of the fiction of the nineteenth century. But it does not seem to me that these successive literary styles were engendered in a direct line. More closely than with its predecessors, each step in the movement towards a fiction that should be 'true to life' was connected with a corresponding step in the movement towards a refined artificiality; and hence I believe that in the case of both movements each step was impelled by a reaction. Charles Sorel was the product of *L'Astrée*,<sup>1</sup> not of the *fabliaux*; Marivaux's novel

<sup>1</sup> *L'Astrée* is a pastoral romance by Honoré d'Urfé, the first parts of which appeared in 1610 and the last part—posthumously

## THE INVERTED IDEAL OF 'GAULOISERIE'

*Marianne*<sup>1</sup> was the product of Marivaux's own comedies, not of Sorel; and Zola, the product of the decay of romanticism as much as, if not much more than, of Balzac—who in Zola's day passed for a realist.

To return to the thirteenth century, perhaps we have not hitherto sufficiently understood how the sensuous and often pornographic style of the fabliaux betrays an *absence of realism* identical, when all is said and done, with that of the idealizing courtly epics. I believe that *gauloiserie*—I mean, the ribaldry and salaciousness of the fabliaux—expresses an attitude which is simply the inversion of Petrarch's. A passage from Huizinga<sup>2</sup> should make this clear.

'French authors like to oppose "l'esprit gaulois" to the conventions of courtly love, as the natural conception and expression opposed to the artificial. Now the former is no less a fiction than the latter. Erotic thought never acquires literary value save by some process of transfiguration of complex and painful reality into illusionary forms. The whole genre of *Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles* and the loose song, with its wilful neglect of all the natural and social complications of love, with its indulgence towards the lies and egotism of sexual life, and its vision of a never-ending lust, implies, no less than the screwed-up system of courtly love, an attempt to substitute for reality the dream of a happier life. It is once more the aspiration towards the life sublime, but this time viewed from the animal side. It is an ideal all the same, even though it be that of unchastity.'

This underlying connexion between *gauloiserie* and an over-

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—in 1627. M. de Rougemont's point here is shown in the fact that Charles Sorel (1597–1674) wrote a novel of adventure, *Histoire comique de Francion* (1622), with the deliberate object of destroying the vogue of the pastoral romance in France at that time, and that, on finding that *L'Astrée* was still extremely popular, he went on to publish a mock pastoral entitled *Le Berger extravagant* (1627).—Translator.

<sup>1</sup> Published from 1731 to 1741.

<sup>2</sup> *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, op. cit., p. 99.



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refined treatment of love is brought to the surface in a thirteenth-century satire called *L'Évangile des femmes*—a sequence of quatrains, the first three lines of each extolling woman in the courtly manner and the last being brutally depreciatory. Another indication of the connexion is the fact that if chivalry made a mock of marriage from above, *gauloiserie* was undermining it from below. The procedure adopted by the latter is well indicated in the *Dit de Chiceface*. Chiceface is a fabulous monster who feeds only on women who keep their marriage vows and he is terribly emaciated. But his comrade Bigorne, whose diet consists exclusively of submissive husbands, is a very barrel of a fellow.

There should also be noted the attitude taken up by the clergy while these two opposite but interrelated tendencies—both begotten by the myth—were making their way in literature. It was Canon Petrarch who gave the example. His later poems are devoted to eulogy of the Virgin—Our Lady in contrast to 'my' Lady—but with no forsaking on that account of the customary vocabulary of courtly poesy.<sup>1</sup> Dante may be said to have avenged the troubadours aforetime by putting the 'Knights of Mary' in hell. These knights were Italian monks who were also known as 'Jolly Knights', because, although they had enlisted under the leadership of a saint, they led dissolute lives.

## VI

### THE LATER HISTORY OF CHIVALRY DOWN TO CERVANTES

Hundreds of MSS. testify to the influence exercised by Arthurian romance throughout the thirteenth, fourteenth,

<sup>1</sup> According to A. Jeanroy, *op. cit.*, II, p. 130, no poem devoted solely to the Virgin is known to exist earlier than the second third of the thirteenth century.

## THE LATER HISTORY OF CHIVALRY

and fifteenth centuries. It was an influence that spread over the same area as that of the troubadours—that is to say, over the whole of Europe. The German *Minnesänger* were nurtured on Catharist legends;<sup>1</sup> and for that matter all they did was to adapt the tales of Chrestien de Troyes from the French. The Romance of *Tristan* was translated into every language of the West. Malory's prose version in the *Morte Darthur* dates from the end of the fifteenth century. Dante looked on the epic and romantic cycle of Northern France as a model for all narrative prose, and Brunetto Latini included in his *Rhetoric* a portrait of the ideal woman which had simply been extracted from *Tristan*. Countless imitations were produced as far afield as Norway, Russia, Hungary, and Spain, and the most instructive examples of these in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are the tales of *Amadis* in Portuguese, in Spanish, and finally in French.

It is remarkable, but doubtless not surprising, that the authors of some of these imitations were brought to rediscover the original meaning of the mystical legends, although, owing either to caution or to lack of penetration, they only made use of an altogether Catholic mythology—something, as we have seen, that could hardly be in harmony with the original intention. In 1554 there was published in Spain a book by Hyeronimo de Sempere entitled flamboyantly *Libro de cavalleria celestial del pié de la rosa fragrante*. In this Christ is given the guise of the Lion Knight; Satan, of the Serpent Knight; John the Baptist, of the Desert Knight; and the Apostles are turned into the twelve Knights of the Round Table. According to Rahn, the Round Table of *Parzival*—that is to say, the sanctuary at Montségur or 'Montsalvat', the ultimate stronghold of the Cathars—symbolized the college of the 'Perfect'.

Cervantes does not name the numerous romances of 'heavenly chivalry' which were being found thrilling in his

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Otto Rahn, *Der Kreuzzug*, op. cit.

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day.<sup>1</sup> In *Don Quixote* he is concerned merely to discredit romances of secular adventure. This neglect on his part remains puzzling. It argues against the theory that he was aware of the true meaning of courtly literature, and that it was out of desperation that he mocked his contemporaries for clinging to an illusion after they had lost the key to it. On this theory, the character Don Quixote was ridiculous only because he wished to undergo an *askesis* for which he had not received initiation and to follow a way of life for which the times were altogether out of joint. The Roman Church had triumphed. The best thing was to be on the winning side, together with the decent and realistic Sancho Panza.

## VII

### ‘ROMEO AND JULIET’, AND THEN MILTON

Rome had triumphed, but not everywhere. In one island her power was still disputed—the island home of the last of the bards. In Cornwall and in Scotland the traditions of the bards were still alive when James Macpherson published in 1765 his so-called *Works of Ossian*.<sup>2</sup> In Ireland they survive to this day.<sup>3</sup> I must forgo touching upon the problem of the extent to which English literature, both popular and learned, is connected with this background of Celtic legend. But it is significant to find at the end of the

<sup>1</sup> I have already mentioned the influence of this literature on Saint Teresa and on the Spanish mystics in general.

<sup>2</sup> Although Morven and Selma, it has been established, are names Macpherson himself invented, Ossianic ballads really did exist in Scotland in the eighteenth century.—Translator.

<sup>3</sup> And W. B. Yeats, of course, was greatly stimulated by his acquaintance with them.—Translator.

‘ROMEO AND JULIET’, AND THEN MILTON  
seventeenth century a sound scholar such as Robert Kirk,  
the theologian and humanist, writing a treatise on sprites  
which bears no trace of either scepticism or irony.

We know almost nothing about Shakespeare—but he  
has left us *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It has been alleged  
that he was a Roman Catholic—and *Romeo and Juliet* is the  
one courtly tragedy, as well as the most magnificent re-  
suscitation of the myth that the world was to be given till  
Wagner wrote and composed his *Tristan*. So long as the  
life and even the identity of Shakespeare remain matters of  
speculation, it is futile to inquire whether or not he was  
privy to the secret traditions of the troubadours. But it may  
be noted that Verona was a main centre of Catharism in  
Italy. According to the monk, Ranieri Sacconi—for seven-  
teen years a heretic—Verona contained nearly five hun-  
dred ‘Perfect’, not to mention the far more numerous  
‘Believers’. It is quite likely that the legends of those days  
preserved some memory of the violent struggles between  
Patarenes and orthodox that the city had been the scene  
of.

In the margin of the religious disputes of the sixteenth  
century, which caused the ancient heresies to be wrapped  
in an ever greater darkness, the tragedy of the *Veronese  
Lovers* tears aside the veil for an instant and leaves in our  
eyes a negative image of ‘the black Sun of Melancholy’.  
Out of those depths of the spirit that are avid for trans-  
figuring torments, the myth arises once again. It has come  
out of the abysmal night where now and then the flash of  
love had lit up features motionless and spell-binding. Now  
it looms before us in the glow of Romeo’s torch. It is the  
‘There go I’ commingled of horror and divinity that we  
invoke in our most splendid poems; and here suddenly, on  
the threshold of the Mantuan tomb, it appears drawn up  
to its full stature, heady with rhetoric and as if stunned by  
its own provocative youth.

Juliet has drunk a potion which sends her to sleep, and

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here she liès. The son of Montague has found her thus, and he speaks aloud.

How oft when men are at the point of death,  
Haue they beene merrie? Which their Keepers call  
A lightning before death. Oh how may I  
Call this a lightning? O my Loue, my Wife,  
Death that hath suckt the honey of thy breath,  
Hath had no power yet vpon thy Beautie.  
Thou art not conquer'd; Beauties ensigne yet  
Is Crymson in thy lips, and in thy cheekes,  
And Deaths pale flaggs not aduanced there.

... Ah deare Juliet:

Why art thou yet so faire? I will belieue,  
Shall I belieue? that vnsubstantiall death is amorous?  
And that the leane abhorred Monster keeps  
Thee here in darke to be his Paramour?  
For feare of that, I still will stay with thee,  
And neuer from this Pallace of dym night  
Depart againe: heere, here will I remaine,  
With Wormes that are thy Chambermaides: O here  
Will I set up my euerlasting rest:  
And shake the yoke of inauspicious starres  
From this world-wearied flesh: Eyes looke your last,  
Armes take your last embrace: And lips, O you  
The doores of breath, seale with a righteous kisse  
A dateless bargaine to ingrossing death:  
Come bitter conduct, come vnsauoury guide,  
Thou desperate Pilot, now at once run on  
The dashing Rocks, thy Sea-sick wearie Barke:  
Here's to my Loue.

(*Drinks.*)

O true Apothecary:

Thy drugs are quicke. Thus with a kisse I die.

Death's *consolament* has sealed the one kind of marriage that Eros ever wished for. Once more there comes a

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‘profane’ dawn, and once more the world begins anew.  
Restored to his strict reign, the Prince declares:

A glooming peace this morning with it brings. . . .  
Go hence, to have more talke of these sad things.

Let us pass to Milton. There is no doubt that Milton, although a Puritan, underwent the influence of Cabalistic doctrines, and anything less ‘spiritualizing’ (in a Manichæan sense) than these doctrines it is impossible to imagine. But the revolt of the Puritans against the monarchy and the bishops who had turned worldly must inevitably remind us of the rebellion of ‘the Pure’ against feudalism and the clergy.

Two poems that Milton wrote in youth—*L’Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*—describe the antagonism of Day and Night, and also expound the nature of the ineluctable choice which at that time he had not yet made. Indeed, he never did choose, or at least chose with such reservations as to leave it impossible to determine in which direction more closely than he wished. Even before embracing the cause of the Puritans, Milton, searching for an epic theme, had sometimes turned over in his mind the Celtic legend of Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. In *Il Penseroso*, after he has hailed black Melancholy, he turns to the ‘sad Virgin’ and bids her the soul of Orpheus to sing, or else to call up him that left half-told the story of Canace’s husband,

That own’d the vertuous Ring and Glass,  
and also ‘great bards’ who

In sage and solemn tunes have sung,  
Of Turneys and of Trophies hung;  
Of Forests, and enchantments drear,  
Where more is meant than meets the ear.

Milton, when preparing his *History of Britain*, studied the

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Arthurian chronicle and its legends. In *De Doctrina christiana* he attacked—to quote a recent French commentator—‘the creative power of God, and also the dogmas of the Trinity and the Incarnation; and he repudiated traditional theological definitions which could not be supported from the Bible’. Even if we set aside this last feature, which, after all, links Milton with the Reformation, he must be considered to display the same heresy that everywhere and at all times appears as the mainspring of a poesy of passion.

As for Milton’s ‘materialism’, it does not contradict a ‘courtly’ doctrine of love as much as might be supposed. Between a monism assimilating mind to matter, or vice versa, and a dualism which condemns matter in the name of mind, there is a gap which the history of Gnostic and Manichæan sects shows to be not unbridgeable, especially on the ethical plane. Idealism and materialism have important presuppositions in common. Extreme licentiousness sometimes goes hand in hand with an extreme and fanatical chastity. And Milton’s negation of death leads him into inferences similar to those expressed by the Cathars. Like them, Milton thinks that a good will issues from intellectual principles, and that a good will can purge us of evil desires—of sensual leanings, the major sin. And Fludd, his master in occultism, taught that light is a divine substance.

It remains that Milton’s theories are more ‘rational’ and are open to a more practical social application than those of the heretics of Southern France. He looks on marriage, for example, as ‘a remedy for incontinence’. Hence these theories did not foster such excessive confusions of the carnal with the spiritual as had previously not failed to occur among Neo-Manichæan sects.

VIII

‘L’ASTRÉE’, OR FROM THE MYSTICAL  
TO THE PSYCHOLOGICAL

THE history of what happened to the myth in the French novel of the seventeenth century can, alas! be summed up in a sentence. Its mystical element was degraded into pure psychology. The novel was given over to an excessively refined literature. Honoré d’Urfé, *La Calprenède* (1614–63), Gomberville (1600–74), and Georges de Scudéry (1601–67), together with his sister Madeleine (1607–1701), had none of them the remotest notion of the esoteric meaning of the chivalry of legend. The symbolical nature of the subjects that they dealt with afresh merely induced them to write interminable novels *à clef*. Polexandre is Louis XIII, Cyrus is the Great Condé, Diane is Marie de Médecis, and so on. The incidents remained the ‘annoyances’ that love meets with, but the obstruction to the satisfaction of love was no longer the secret and metaphysical wish for death of *Tristan*; it became that fad of the ruling class, a point of honour. Heroines display a more lively inventiveness than their lovers in the matter of excuses for parting. Every one of them also delights in terrifying her chivalrous suitor; and in Gomberville’s novel Polexandre roams wildly over the five continents to make amends for whatever may have been the cause of a single angry glance from his mistress. In the end he is still uncertain whether this ‘queen of the unattainable Island’ is not going to have him beheaded. But, as a rule, the tales finish up with a wedding. Foreseen on the first page, the wedding is delayed till the ten thousandth when the author is a star performer in his line. The happy ending was first introduced in the allegorical novel of the seventeenth century. The genuine courtly romance culminated in death; it



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dissolved into an elevation outside the world. Now there was a general desire that everything should be tidied up; society had to be in the right, and hence the endings of novels became a return to something essentially alien to romance—happiness.

In *L'Astrée* the great tragic themes of the myth reappear as no more than melancholy echoes. No doubt there are the twelve laws of Love, ingeniously contrived partings, a eulogy of chastity, and even challenges to a death of release. But the stark and elemental interactions of *Tristan* have dwindled into mere coquetting, and the struggle between Night and Day has become but twilight antics. No longer does the drawn sword lie between the two lovers; instead Céladon places there a gilt globe tied with his shepherdess's favour. And here is something that sums up all the rest. In the fifth and final volume, the despairing Céladon summons death, and Astrée, on her side, also feels that there is only one way out. Together they go to the Fountain of Truth, which is guarded by lions and unicorns, and ask for an end to be put to their ills. According to the oracle, the spell put upon the fountain will only be broken at the death of the most constant lover and of the most constant mistress. Incidentally, this recalls the way the lovers in *Tristan* seek forgiveness on the score that the effects of the love-potion have been beyond their control. Céladon takes his courage in both hands and advances. But thereupon, *mirabile dictu!* the lions and unicorns set to devouring one another, the sky grows dark, thunder roars, and the Genie of Love appears in order to make known that after all the spell is broken. Astrée and Céladon have fainted—a metaphorical death—and are carried to the dwelling of the druid Adamas, where they revive; and presently they get married.

The prodigious success enjoyed by *L'Astrée* in the years following its appearance is apt to be declared unaccountable. And yet a reader to-day easily finds this pastoral

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romance as absorbing as any recent French novel in the fantastic vein. Nor has it become impossible for a French writer to win celebrity if his gift lies in elegant allegorization; as to that, the name of Jean Giraudoux is witness. *L’Astrée* delighted La Fontaine, who described it as ‘exquisite’. Its scene is laid on the banks of the little river Lignon, north of St. Etienne, and Rousseau went there specially from Lyons in quest of the shades of Diane and Silvandre. It is true that these two characters were entirely unknown to the landlady at his inn. She told him that the neighbourhood possessed excellent blacksmiths, and that its wrought iron work was deservedly reputed. ‘The good woman’, he notes with disappointment, ‘must have taken me for a locksmith’s apprentice.’

From the standpoint of literary art, *L’Astrée* is certainly a perfect achievement. Never have the resources of a more highly accomplished rhetoric been so thoroughly harmonized, and no novel was ever better written or made to progress more strictly in accordance with the laws of an unerring aesthetic. The use of ‘stock characters’—shepherd, shepherdess, fickle youth, coquette, bold lover, and so on—guarantees that the interplay of emotion shall be clear-cut, and I may even say—shall bear the stamp of truth. Of course art, not ‘life’, directs the tale. Novels nowadays are a mixture of cloudily reflected images, more or less damaging admissions, and undeserved bits of luck. But *L’Astrée* is a product of the mind—in short, a real *work*. It presupposes the perfect mastery of one’s craft and twenty-five years of attentive effort. If its success, once it had been launched, was no doubt the result of a feeling people had that they must be in the swim, literary snobbery was nevertheless better informed then than it is to-day.

But precisely because the literary labour that was lavished on the book results in such finish, we are entitled to ask what the display of technical mastery is worth. In contrast with the original myth—every theme of which it

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takes up anew—*L'Astrée* degrades the tragical into emotionalism and destiny into fictional machinery. Honoré d'Urfé's aim is merely to moralize and to entertain. We are led to ask ourselves if the most admirable literature is not, in virtue of its very impeccability, simply a by-product of the mystic systems that bring myths into existence and set up formality. In order to flower and to find its end in some independent piece of work, literature would seem to require the provisional drying up of the deep springs that have watered it. Perhaps that is why literature, no matter how pleasurably it stirs the passions of the heart, will surrender almost at once to attacks by the realistically-minded and by what is called civic sense—as we see it doing all around us now—whereas mysticism and religion draw an added vigour from being mocked at and from attempts to confute them.

A decree of the semi-official Boileau—his short *Dialogue sur les héros de roman*—was enough to condemn to silence and neglect—even in our text-books to-day—both the fanciful fiction engendered by *L'Astrée* and its parasite, the comic novel.<sup>1</sup> Only one more flame, a flame tenuous and pure, was going to be lit—Madame de Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678). In this novel of unhappy love, death is given the mild form of a voluntary parting, and in place of chivalry we have virtue, a virtue which in the end sides with the world.

<sup>1</sup> Sorel's *Berger extravagant* [mentioned supra, p. 183, note.—Translator] repeats in the key of burlesque, alias 'realism', all the artificial situations of *L'Astrée*. Likewise Scarron's *Roman comique* (1662), &c.

## CORNEILLE

### IX

## CORNEILLE, OR GIVING BATTLE TO THE MYTH

It was in the French classical drama—and therefore at the heart of an intolerant order—that passion most strikingly scored its revenge. Corneille's *La Place royale* is a thoroughly unpleasant play. Alidor, in love with Angélique as she with him, 'is disturbed by a love that attaches him too closely', and so he tries to arrange that his mistress shall fall into the arms of his friend Cléandre. There has been a suggestion that in using this plot Corneille becomes the first writer to represent passion being controlled, if not by morality, at least by reason. This would mean that he was the first writer to escape from the domination of the myth, and the matter is accordingly worth examining. Here is how Alidor complains in Act I:

'Tis surfeit of her love oppresses me like doom.  
Did she grow cool a moment, I should escape my gloom.  
Some touch of jealousy, one look of irritation—  
At once I could subdue my mad infatuation.  
But she is without fault, and more perfect than she  
Is the attachment fond that she displays to me.  
By such intentions sweet is all she does impelled  
That I'm o'erwhelmed with favours till my peace lies  
felled.

There is no need to go on. These opening lines are enough to show that Alidor must be a queer sort of lover. What! Happiness he declares to be fatal to his peace, and were only Angélique unfaithful to him that would cure him of his love! Evidently he is trying his best to conceal something. And in the light of the earlier sections of this book we cannot fail to recognize what it is. He is another of

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the lovers who yearn to be branded! But his yearning he can only admit by asserting its opposite; for he appears on the stage of history at a period when a yearning for misfortune can no longer be avowed. So he is driven to confess his secret craving in the guise of a pretence that he really harbours its contrary—by alléging, when really he longs to be still more completely enslaved, that he longs to be free. 'I blush to suffer grievous ills that I lament', he declares presently. Thus shame is what inspires his deceit. Actually, he suffers from the absence of any *obstruction* between the too fond Angélique and himself. The game he wants to play is short of a King Mark. He is in the situation of Tristan and Iseult at the end of their three years in the Forest, when Tristan was able to renew the obstruction by restoring the queen to her husband. But Alidor has to invent a rival. Thwarted in the gratification of his yearning by the lack of anything that can part him from Angélique, but ashamed to admit how that lack causes him to suffer, he thinks of deploring that he should be fettered *too closely* by her fidelity, when actually he despairs of being fettered closely enough. In proclaiming a need to be free he expresses a deep-seated wish to be in such a position as no longer to wish for any freedom whatever. For this is the position in which he would be the moment Angélique gave the least sign of escaping from him. But he is artful, as the following passage from the play shows:

CLÉANDRE. Was ever lover glowing with an ardour such  
As to complain that he was being lov'd too much?

ALIDOR. What! Can you then suppose I am so common-place

That vulgar feelings I'd contentedly embrace?

His manner is haughty. It is a sign that he is about to indulge in more deceit. He continues:

'Tis mad to be the slave of what has us in thrall,  
And mad to feed with love what's not at beck and call.

## CORNEILLE

I hate its forcing me; hence firmly I'm intending  
To keep my expectations on my will depending.  
Free of ardour's bondage, 'tis my ambition bold  
That as I please I'll warm, and as I please grow cold.

The passage may erroneously be regarded as typical of Corneille. But even if we were unaware of the existence of the myth, the remainder of the comedy would show us that Alidor's real desire is exactly the opposite of what he thus haughtily contends that it is. 'Tis mad to be the slave of what has us in thrall' really means: 'It is only worth while becoming the slave of what holds us completely in thrall—what, in eluding us, causes our ardour to glow ever more intensely—for that is what would truly *please* us.' The last six words, 'and as I please grow cold', are simply a piece of rhetorical artifice intended to persuade the reader, or Cléandre, or Corneille himself, that freedom is desired, whereas what is wished for is obviously 'ardour'—and no subservient ardour either.

Let me repeat that it is easy to be taken in. Corneille does his best to ensure that we shall be. In the dedication of the play to some unidentified person, he says:

'It is from you I have learned that a decent man's love should always spring up at the bidding of his will; that love should never be where it might also not be; that if nevertheless this happens, it is a tyranny the yoke of which must be thrown off; and, lastly, that a person beloved is under far greater obligation to our love when this results from our choice and her qualities than when it arises from a blind attraction and is compelled by some inherent disposition we are unable to fight against. . . . Nothing is a gift unless it might also be withheld from us.'

This is good, and well put. But do not let us overlook that to refuse obedience to inexorable compulsion and to give only with the freedom making a gift worth while were two things inculcated by courtly love as fundamental; they

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were made requisite in one of the *leys d'amor*. Moreover, there was an ulterior motive in requiring them; it was believed that they would tell against marriage. In spite of themselves, Alidor and the Angélique whose fidelity he deplores are in a situation equivalent to the married state; and he wants to escape from this situation, not owing to love of freedom, as he alleges, but owing to love of passion. He says:

Whatever be the cost, my chains must be struck off,  
For fear that union could my self-control corrode,  
And turn a love by force into a love I owed.

This is altogether the language of courtly love. But we must note a curious contradiction. To begin with, Alidor declares that he wants peace; but now he expresses a fear of marriage on the ground that peace is precisely what it would bring to him.

Let me give her offence and thus stir up her hate.  
As long as o'er her heart my sway I have retained  
Desir'd recovery can never be attained.

His desire of recovery—let us read: 'desire to be branded' and therefore a fear of recovery—is satisfied in Act V. Later on, in an *Examination* of the play, Corneille recognized this, at the same time as he necessarily simulated surprise at it.

'This fondness for peace [he wrote] does not prevent Alidor from showing in the fifth act that he is still passionately attached to this mistress, notwithstanding his having resolved to be rid of her, and notwithstanding the betrayals he has inflicted upon her, *so that it seems as if he only begins to love her once he has given her cause to hate him.*' Here is a clean breast of the matter. But from the purely psychological aspect in which Corneille views it, he is bound to overlook the significance of the *myth* that directs Alidor's behaviour, and in the end he decides very feebly

## RACINE, OR THE MYTH UNLOOSED

that Alidor is simply guilty of a logical fallacy. 'This displays', he says, 'an unevenness of conduct that is vicious.'

Corneille's blindness regarding his real intention should not surprise us, even though this intention is so perfectly carried out. The centre of the myth of unhappy love is, as we have seen, a passion that cannot be admitted. Corneille's originality lies in having sought to attack and deny this passion by which he was sustained, and to attack and deny the myth that he reinvented in his two most splendid tragedies, *Polyeucte* and *Le Cid*.<sup>1</sup> He wished to preserve at least the *principle* of freedom—that is, the principle of the human person,—without however sacrificing to it the delightful and tormenting effects of the irresistible 'love-potion'—here metaphorical. Better still, he made the desire to be free a highly effective instrument of the passion which it claimed to feel as intolerable. That is why the tension in 'the drama of duty' is uneven—as those incapable of liking it have said and will ever go on saying.

## X

## RACINE, OR THE MYTH UNLOOSED

In relation to the myth, the antithesis in which Racine and Corneille are usually placed amounts to this—that Racine sets out from the assumption that the love-potion divests those who have taken it of every shred of responsibility—'C'est Venus tout entiere à sa proye attachée'<sup>2</sup>—whereas

<sup>1</sup> Eminent critics have considered that Corneille's masterpiece is *Cinna*, and in George Saintsbury's opinion it is *Rodogune*.—Translator.

<sup>2</sup> *Phèdre*, Act I, iii. The heroine is avowing her passion for her stepson, and describes herself as the personification of Venus intently ravening her prey.



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Corneille insists on treating the potion as 'a tyranny the yoke of which must be thrown off'. That is how it happens that there is a voluptuous harmony in the one and a dialectical tension in the other, the former allowing himself to be carried along by the stream, the latter battling against it even as it sweeps him along (or the better to feel himself being swept along).

An *invitus invitam*<sup>1</sup> being the subject of *Bérénice*, this play may be described as a plot from Antiquity being interpreted by a 'modern' who bears in mind the courtly notion of unhappy love. The *invitus invitam* thus becomes the very expression of the myth. But Racine, in his early plays, accommodates the scope of the myth to the proportions of an excessively 'verisimilar' psychology.

'I have not [he says] gone so far as to make Berenice kill herself, as Dido did, because Berenice and Titus had not given one another the ultimate pledges which Dido exchanged with Aeneas, and hence unlike Dido she was under no obligation to renounce life.'

Obviously the 'plea' being opposed here to the passion of Night is artificial and weak.

'A tragedy [Racine continues] need not necessarily include bloodshed and death; it is enough that the action should be lofty, the characters heroic, and *the passions excited in it*, and that pervading the whole there should be that majestic sadness wherein all the enjoyment of tragedy resides.'

But the 'majestic sadness' referred to is only half the myth—its diurnal aspect and its moral reflection in our lives as finite creatures. There is lacking the nocturnal aspect and its mystic flowering in the infinite life of Night.

<sup>1</sup> Titus, who passionately loved Berenice, and even, so it was supposed, had promised to marry her, sent her away from Rome, against her will and against his own, soon after he had succeeded to the purple of the empire.—Suetonius, as adapted by Racine in the preface to *Bérénice*.

## RACINE, OR THE MYTH UNLOOSED

There is lacking what might symmetrically be called 'that majestic delight wherein all the pain of Romance resides'. For in order to reach this other aspect, or even to become aware of it, he would have had to go as far as death, the death he deems unnecessary. Contrary to received opinion, the much extolled classical restraint involves a metaphysical impoverishment which engenders confusions of incalculable effect. For, after all, let Racine's 'sadness' be as 'majestic' as you please, inasmuch as it is self-confined and implies neither a beyond nor any reversal of plot into joy, and inasmuch further as it is accepted for what it is in the world of day and nevertheless is called 'enjoyment', I do not see how it can ever be more than a *morosa delectatio*.

No doubt we are entitled to dispute the ultimate dogma of the mystical (Manichaeic) belief at the root of the passion myth. None the less, thanks to this belief drama and the ordeals of lovers represented in drama acquire a justification, because it endows them with an unmistakable grandeur. If the lovers are infatuated with obstruction and with their consequent anguish, that is because the obstruction is death in disguise and because death is the pledge of their transfiguration, of the moment in which what has hitherto been Night will be revealed as absolute Day. But Racine, in failing to go the length of death, constrains both us and himself to savour an essentially dubious sadness. The Eros of *cortexia* claimed to release men from the life of matter by way of death; and Christian agape aims at sanctifying life itself. But Racine, in being content to represent 'passions excited' and to produce the 'sadness' in which he invites us to find an aimless 'enjoyment', betrays a rather morbid acceptance of the defeat of mind and of the resignation of the senses. At this stage Racine's work is already hinting that his surrender to the *mal du siècle*—that is to say, to the secularization of passion—can only lead him into Jansenism; for Jansenism is the kind of morose mortification—self-punishment, Freud calls it—most ap-

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propriate to the romantic temperament. And yet his conversion could never have occurred had it not been for a crisis in which he himself became aware of the true character of his frenzy. *Phèdre* marks not only a decisive moment in the poet's life, but also one in the transformations of the myth during the course of European history.

### XI

#### 'PHÈDRE', OR 'PUNISHING': THE MYTH

THE death-theme is omitted from *Bérénice* by the operation of a moral 'censorship' of unmistakably Christian origin. At this stage Racine neither can be, nor does he wish to be, entirely clear-sighted. For then he would be compelled to reject that which he dares cherish only in his innermost heart without admitting to himself that he does so. But the shock of a passion which he conceived for some woman—very likely, the actress Champmeslé—together with the first stirrings of a real faith, drove him—as if in his own despite and more wholeheartedly than he had foreseen—into making a complete avowal.

In *Phèdre* death gets its own back. Yes, Racine was now aware that it is necessary for a tragedy to include bloodshed and death if it is about passionate love. However, he did not want death to be a transfiguration. He was now siding with day, and death could be no more than the penalty for his previous protracted indulgence. Passion, his own passion, is what he punishes when consigning the daughter of Minos to death, and passion is also his victim. Under cover of the ancient story, Racine doubly penalizes himself. First, by making the obstruction incest—that is to say, an impediment there is no admitting any wish to over-

## ‘PHÈDRE’, OR ‘PUNISHING’ THE MYTH

come. Public inclination—to which Racine was invariably very attentive—continued to side with Tristan against King Mark, with the seducer against the deceived husband; but it could never have sided with an incestuous couple. Secondly, Racine penalizes himself at second-hand by refusing to allow that Hippolytus shall return Phædra’s passion. *Phèdre* was written for Marie Champmeslé, who played the queen; and Hippolytus is Racine—Racine as he now wished himself to be: insensitive to the fatal spell. Identifying Phædra with the woman he loved, he scored over the object of his passion, and convinced himself that this passion was to be condemned *beyond appeal*.

But, as I have said, Racine at the time he wrote *Phèdre* was in the thick of a crisis and still undecided regarding its resolution. Hence the play’s profound duplicity. The moral law, which Racine wished to obey henceforth, compelled him to make the young prince insensitive to Phædra’s love. Her love is therefore termed ‘incestuous’, although she is only Hippolytus’s stepmother. At the same time, the old Adam, the natural Racine, sought to evade this rigorous law, which, in banning incest, makes passion impossible. He did so by causing Hippolytus to be in love with Aricia; for she, as will be seen, is Phædra in disguise. It is a very clever device.

‘As regards the character of Hippolytus [Racine writes in the preface to *Phèdre*], I had noticed in the Ancients that Euripides was reproached with having represented him as a philosopher free of all imperfection: so that the death of this young prince aroused far more indignation than pity. I thought I ought to give him some frailty *which should render him a little guilty towards his father*, without however depriving him of any of that magnanimity thanks to which he spares Phædra’s honour, and allows himself to be oppressed without accusing her. I call “frailty” the passion that he feels against his will for Aricia, who is daughter and sister of his father’s mortal enemies.’

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So Aricia in the play is 'the love forbidden by the Father'—a veiled substitute for incestuous love.<sup>1</sup> Psycho-analysis has recently made us familiar with more cunning subterfuges! But it is not incest, it is passion, that interests and involves Racine. The other means he hit upon of referring to it in voluptuous terms, even while submitting to its being condemned, was that of the unimpeachable argument of the love-potion. Here, as in the myth, 'Destiny' is made to relieve both the author and those who love of all responsibility.

The gods, dear prince, if once your hour is come,  
Care little for the reasons that should guide us.<sup>2</sup>

These are not gods that Corneille would have worshipped!  
Nor would he have allowed that gods can be deceived, nor  
that a fault can be laid at their door.

The gods will bear me witness,  
Who have within my veins kindled this fire.<sup>3</sup>

And here is the waiting-woman Oenone who speaks to  
Phaedra in the same way as the waiting-woman Brengain  
speaks to Isolde:

You love. We cannot conquer destiny.  
You were drawn on as by a fatal charm.<sup>4</sup>

I spoke of 'duplicity', but this is so thoroughly essential to the play, producing as it does the very crisis from which the play issues, that to blame the author would be foolish. *Phèdre* had to be. The myth had to be brought up into the light. There had to be this painful upthrust on the part of

<sup>1</sup> Hippolytus, referring to Aricia in Act I, asks:

Shall I espouse  
Her rights against my sire, rashly provoke  
His wrath?

The translations are by R. B. Boswell (1890).

<sup>2</sup> *Phèdre*, Act I, i.

<sup>3</sup> Act II, v.

<sup>4</sup> Act IV, vi.

## 'PHÈDRE', OR 'PUNISHING' THE MYTH

the yearning for death as it first sought its self-release by means of an impossible avowal, then held back, and finally attained to self-confession in the very moment of renunciation—keeping pace with the motion of the queen on three occasions.<sup>1</sup> All this had to be, in order that passionate love might finally succumb to the Norm of Day. For in *Phèdre* terrestrial day, for the first time since the rise of the myth in the twelfth century, triumphs over the death of the woman lover, thus reversing the whole of the interaction in both *Tristan* and *Romeo and Juliet*.

Death from mine eyes veiling the light of heav'n,  
Restores its purity that they defiled.

She dies, my Lord!

Would that the memory  
Of her disgraceful deed could perish with her!<sup>2</sup>

In spite of everything, in spite even of this last touch that Racine made into a piece of deceit, I believe he must have been sincere when in the preface to *Phèdre* he wrote:

'This I can vouch for, that I never wrote a tragedy in which virtue was more plainly exhibited than it is here. The least faults are severely *punished*. The mere notion of a crime is regarded with as much horror as crime itself. *The frailties of love are treated as real weaknesses*. Passions are brought before the eye only in order to show how much disorder they cause.'

This is far removed from the intention of 'exciting passions' in order to gratify a desire for 'majestic sadness'. It is within sight of Port Royal.

Racine, like Petrarch, belonged to the race of troubadours who betray Love for love. Nearly all of them ended

<sup>1</sup> The confession to the Nurse in Act I; that in Act II to Hippolytus: 'Hé bien, connoy donc Phèdre et toute sa fureur!'; and the avowal made to Theseus in Act V.

<sup>2</sup> Act V, vii.

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up in religion—a religion of retreat, it is true, so that subconsciously they perhaps intended to deal a last blow at intolerable day.

## XII

### ECLIPSE OF THE MYTH

In spite of Corneille and in spite of Racine up to *Phèdre*, the end of the French seventeenth century suffered from, or benefited by—whichever you like—a first eclipse of the myth alike in manners and in philosophy. The ordering—not to say, the drilling—of feudal society by the King-State involved somewhat far-reaching changes in emotional relations and in customs. Marriage became once again the basic institution, and reached a point of stability at which there was great difficulty in keeping it in subsequent centuries, and which in previous centuries had not been known. An ‘alliance’ between two families was negotiated with as much formality as one by diplomatists. If the parties happened to have a real or fancied inclination for one another, this merely added an element of exquisite perfection and of agreeable luxury to the arrangement—an ultimate touch of whimsicality amounting almost to arrogance. (In the eighteenth century it quickly came to be considered bad taste.) Suitability of rank and a matching of ‘qualities’ were the perfect standards of a satisfactory marriage, curiously like the custom of China. Indeed, it was in the ‘rational’ seventeenth century that European manners became severed from religious beliefs, even as Confucius considers they should be, and, although the change apparently attracted no notice, were made to conform to the current laws of reason, and hence to ignore the Christian absolute. No longer the unforeseeable effects of grace, but ‘worth’,

## ECLIPSE OF THE MYTH

decided a union, and it was 'worth' alone which rendered 'agreeable' a prospective partner whose pros and cons had been scrupulously weighed. Such was the triumph of Jesuitic morality. Emotion was imprisoned in the showy contrivances of the classical baroque. For that matter, the analytic treatment of passion by such writers as Descartes, its conversion to clearly distinct psychological categories and to rational hierarchies of qualities, worthiness, and faculties, must of necessity have brought about the dissolution of the myth and the arrest of its original impetus. For the myth has been able to assert its sway there only where precisely all moral categories vanish—beyond Good and Evil, in *transports*, and in the transgression of the sphere within which morality is valid.

The case of Spinoza deserves a section to itself. His influence on manners, however, only made itself felt two centuries after him, when the *Sturm und Drang* philosophers had translated him into German for the benefit of poets, and these had translated him into metaphors for the benefit of an emotional middle class. The ultimate result was to produce voluble chatter about the divinity of the countryside on a Sunday. Spinoza defines love as 'joy accompanied by the idea of an external cause'.<sup>1</sup> The definition is accurate in a single instance, the only instance this mystic considers—when the external cause is a God with whom our soul may identify itself.<sup>2</sup> But Spinoza disregards the existence of *obstruction*. Actually, our human passions are always connected with antagonistic passions, our love with hate, and our pleasures with our pains. Between joy and its external cause there is invariably some gap and some obstruction—society, sin, virtue, the body, the separate self. Hence arises the ardour of passion. And hence it is that the wish for complete union is indissolubly

<sup>1</sup> *Ethics*, Book III, def. 6.

<sup>2</sup> This supports what was said earlier in connexion with Eckhart. Unitive mysticism is unaware of divine *passion*.



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linked with a wish for the death that brings release. It is because passion cannot exist without pain that passion makes our ruin seem desirable. When the Portuguese nun Mariana Alcaforado wrote to the man who had seduced her, she said: 'I give thanks to you from my innermost heart for the despair into which you have cast me; I despise the peace in which I lived before knowing you. Adieu! Love me, then, for ever, and go on making me suffer the cruellest torments!' Towards the end of the eighteenth century, another woman, Julie de Lespinasse (1732-76)—first the friend and then the rival of the Mme. du Deffand of the famous *salon*—wrote: 'I love you as one ought to love—with despair!'

But till the advent of Rousseau the eighteenth century in France was indeed a period of total eclipse for the black Sun of Melancholy. The 'points' and 'worthiness' which the rakes of the Regency and of the reign of Louis the Fifteenth considered 'civil' were no longer in any sense moral, but intellectual and physical. When the distinction between mind and body took the place of the separation of mind from believing soul, the result was to divide a human being into intelligence and sex. Actually, with every obstruction removed, passion was without impetus. And it became the fashion to talk of *passionnettes* or little passions. The god of Love was no longer an adamant destiny but a cheeky child. Hardly anything was forbidden. Of the natural obstruction of modesty enough was retained for the needs of the rhetoric of desire, but no longer even enough for the needs of that of love.

## XIII

DON JUAN AND THE MARQUIS DE  
SADE

If we shut our eyes after gazing at a white statue we shall have the image of a black. In the same way, the eclipse of the myth conjured up the exact opposite of Tristan. If Don Juan, historically speaking, is no invention of the eighteenth century, the period nevertheless played in relation to this character the very part assigned in Manichæan doctrine to Lucifer as regards Creation. The period gave shape to Tirso de Molina's (Don Juan) *Tenorio*, and endowed the hero of that play with two thoroughly typical features—*black wickedness* and *rascality*. Nothing could be more directly the reverse of the twin virtues of chivalrous love—candour and courtesy!

The way in which the mythical character of Don Juan stirs the emotions of women and fascinates the minds of some men is to be accounted for, I fancy, by his *infinitely contradictory* nature. Don Juan is at one and the same time sheer spontaneity of instinct and sheer mind aflutter over the sea of possibility. He is constant inconstancy, and also the constant quest of the one woman whom desire in its untiring self-deception is never able to find. He is the insolent avidity of a youth renewed at every fresh encounter, and he is also the hidden weakness of an inability to possess, because devoid of enough *being* ever to *have*. Let me be content with taking the dramatic Don Juan as an inverted reflection of Tristan, and in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* rather than in Molière's *Don Juan*; for the latter, in my opinion, is by far the less significant.<sup>1</sup>

The contrast occurs first in the external demeanour and

<sup>1</sup> It may be mentioned incidentally that at its original production Molière's play had no success.

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movement of the two characters. Don Giovanni seems always to be riding the high horse, and always to be poised in readiness to hasten forward again whenever he chances to have halted in his progress. But Tristan walks on to the stage with the somnambulistic deliberation of one hypnotized by some object of wonderful and inexhaustible value. The former possessed a thousand and three women,<sup>1</sup> the latter only one. But it is the man of many who is poor, whereas in a single being infinitely possessed there is concentrated the wide world. Tristan can forgo the world—because he loves! But Don Giovanni, although incessantly loved, is never able to love in return. Hence his anxiety and his agitated wanderings. Don Giovanni seeks in the act of love a voluptuous profanation. By remaining chaste, Tristan wishes to achieve a divinizing ‘prowess’. Don Giovanni’s line is rape, and no sooner has he scored than he surrenders the field and flees. But according to the rule of courtly love, rape is the crime of crimes, a felony for which there is no remission; and homage is a pledge unto death. Don Giovanni, however, likes crime for its own sake, and in that way subjects himself to the morality which he transgresses. In order to enjoy abusing it, he has the greatest need of its existence. Tristan, instead, foresees being released from both sins and virtues, thanks to the operation of the rule and by the grace of a virtue which transcends both the world and the Law. In sum, the antithesis is as follows—Don Giovanni is the demon of unalloyed immanence, a prisoner of worldly appearances, and the martyr of a more and more deceptive and despicable sensation, whereas Tristan is the prisoner of a realm lying beyond night and day and the martyr of a *rapture* which is transformed at death into unalloyed bliss. It may also be noted that if, when the Commander holds out his hand in the last act, Don Giovanni jokes, laughs loudly, and pro-

<sup>1</sup> In Spain alone, and plus 1,062 in other countries!—Translator.

## DON JUAN AND THE MARQUIS DE SADE

vokes death, he thereby redeems in a supreme act of defiance the base deeds that would have dishonoured a true knight; but Tristan, sad and brave, never surrenders his pride till luminous death is at hand.

The two have only one feature in common. Both appear sword in hand.

From about the time Louis the Fourteenth died in 1715 till Louis the Sixteenth ascended the throne in 1774, Don Juan reigned over the dreams of a French aristocracy that had gradually fallen from feudal heroism. The Duke of Richelieu and the Duke of Lauzun on the topmost social rungs, Bezenval and Casanova at the level of the rascally adventurer—such were the paragons who took the place of the ideal destroyed in the preceding century. The repression of the myth by an all-embracing irony and the applauded triumph of ‘felons’ soon excited some curious reactions. Amid so much pliancy, so much intellectual and sensual refinement, so much satiation, one most profound human need was left ungratified—the need of suffering. If the body social encourages this need, it grows enfeebled, as is shown by the waning of the Middle Ages; but if the body social remains unconscious of this need or imagines that the need can be ridiculed, it quickly dries up and grows enervated. Thereupon the mind proceeds to invent in the guise of acts of cruelty the sufferings it has forbidden the heart to undergo. Kindness is a stranger to those who have not suffered: their fancies lose all vital touch and all capacity for being in sympathy. Woman in the eyes of eighteenth-century men was merely ‘a means’. At one extreme there had been the ideal woman, the unalloyed symbol of a Love drawing love away beyond visible forms; at the other there was now woman as a mere means to pleasure, the more or less agreeable instrument of a sensation which kept men self-isolated.

The material for the writings of the Marquis de Sade

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sprang out of the contradiction between Don Juan and Tristan; they issued from the intolerable tension of a mind that sustained *its life* with this contradiction by undergoing sensuality and yet yearning for the courtly ideal. That is where the Marquis obtained his material, and it is also what supplied the motive power of his rebellion. Sade admired the poetry of Petrarch, as he remarks in his *Crimes de l'amour*. The admiration had been traditional in his family ever since his direct ancestor, Hugues de Sade, married Petrarch's lady, Laure de Noves.<sup>1</sup> Petrarch seems to have been entirely unaware of the existence of either desire or bodies; he was unaware of woman as 'a means'. Sade, a product of the eighteenth century, was only too conscious of the monotonous tyranny which the 'means' exerted. What Petrarch ignored was the physical obstruction upon which a lover has to get his own back. Yet the means is only too unmistakably there: it is the means to pleasure, and pleasure is a yoke. How be released from it except by excess, since all excess issues from the mind! Nothing could be more coldly reasoned than the countless 'voluptuous' inventions of the Marquis's rage. Where pleasure is, there must suffering be; and suffering is the sign of a redemption. We are purified by evil; let us sin then to the utmost so as to destroy the ultimate allurements of sin. Instead of ignoring the means, let us destroy it by subjecting it to tortures which will nevertheless afford us some pleasure, and this will be part of our *askesis*! A dialectical frenzy seized Sade. Only murder can restore freedom, and it must be the murder of the beloved, inasmuch as loving is what fetters us. Only one's love can be really killed, for one's love alone is *sovereign*. The crime of an impure love will redeem purity.

With this key in hand, let us now consider a passage

<sup>1</sup> Abbé de Sade, the Marquis's uncle, is the author of *Remarques sur les premiers poètes français et les troubadours*, and of three (anonymous) volumes of *Memoirs of Petrarch*.

## DON JUAN AND THE MARQUIS DE SADE

from *La Philosophie du boudoir* in which Dolmancé puts forward a moral defence of murder.

'What! [he says] An ambitious *sovereign* shall be able to destroy as he likes and without scruple the foes that hamper the execution of his schemes for achieving greatness! *Cruel, arbitrary and imperious laws* shall likewise murder in every century millions of human beings! And yet weak and unfortunate private persons such as ourselves shall not be allowed to sacrifice a single being to our *revenge* or to our caprice? Could anything be more barbarous or more ridiculously queer? And should we not, *under cover of the most profound mystery, avenge ourselves abundantly* for this absurdity?'<sup>1</sup>

Had the Marquis de Sade been asked what were the inner motives of his weird moral professions, no doubt he would have taken refuge in a cold-blooded prolixity. But every one of his arguments is transparent. They all mean the exact opposite of what they say literally.<sup>2</sup> His glorification of sex is a continual and deliberate profanation of the profaned eighteenth-century morality. It is the act of an atheist taking 'the negative way' (because he despairs of unloosing his bonds), and therefore challenging love to manifest itself by killing the criminal.<sup>3</sup> For only thus could

<sup>1</sup> M. de Rougemont's italics.

<sup>2</sup> 'Sade wrote *Juliette ou les Malheurs de la vertu* (1791), and then *Justine ou les Prospérités du vice*. It is the exact opposite [and therefore, according to psycho-analysis, the exact opposite of this opposite, and so on] of *Remedies for One and the Other Fortune* by Petrarch', C. A. Cingria remarks in his *Pétrarque*.

<sup>3</sup> The above analysis of the sadistic crime has been strikingly supported in two remarkable studies by Pierre Klossowski: 'Le Mal et la Négation d'autrui dans la philosophie de D. A. F. de Sade' (*Recherches philosophiques* (Paris), IV, 1934-5) and 'Temps et agressivité' (ibid., V, 1935-6). The author considers that Sade looked upon evil as the only element in nature. In *La Nouvelle Justine* there occurs this passage: 'Yes, I hold nature in abhorrence; and this is because I am only too well aware that I detest it. Apprised of its horrible secrets, I have taken a kind of

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release be obtained—according to the faith of the troubadours.

### XIV

#### ‘LA NOUVELLE HÉLOÏSE’

Brought up in the Genevan countryside, Rousseau escaped the influence of urban Don Juanism; but he was unable to steer clear of a literature to which his temperament responded very deeply. This literature may be called Petrarchism. Strictly speaking, Rousseau's novel is not a resuscitation of the primitive Tristan myth. It lacks the savage violence of the legend, and still more it lacks the legend's esoteric background. What he resuscitated was the spiritual state originally brought into existence by imitators of the troubadours through their ‘secularization’ of a doctrine they were aware of only as a profane rhetoric. This spiritual state is *acedia*—the happy melancholy cultivated by Petrarch, the Vaucluse hermit. The analytic summaries added by a zealous editor to the third edition of the novel contain situations such as the *leys de cortexia* allowed

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pleasure in copying its dark wickedness.’ Hence the sadistic desire to obtain release from the tyranny of sex through excesses of debauchery. Another truly Manichaean attack on Creation is as follows: ‘The life principle in every being is no other than the death principle. We take in both at one and the same time and nourish them within us.’ But if life and created nature are but dark wickedness and cruelty, it becomes necessary to obtain release from them by exceeding this cruelty and wickedness. And there is but the alternative to be cruel either to ourselves or to others. Sade chose others. He preferred to be a criminal rather than a victim. Hence the Sadistic conscience is the antithesis of the romantic conscience. The romantic—Petrarch—punishes himself in order to preserve the beloved, whereas Sade sought to kill the beloved.

## ‘LA NOUVELLE HÉLOÏSE’

for. Rousseau puts the *Canzoniere* into prose, and makes them rather middle-class in the process.<sup>1</sup> Honoré d’Urfé had turned courtesy into a profane casuistry. Rousseau made of it a kind of refined pietism. Here again the deterioration is obvious.

The Héloïse who lived in the twelfth century<sup>2</sup> and whose letters to Abélard have been preserved is far closer to Iseult, Juliet, and Mlle. de Lespinasse than to Julie d’Étanges, the heroine of Rousseau’s novel. And, in spite of his magnificent name, there is nothing either mystical or chivalrous about Saint-Preux, the hero. Moreover, although the novel ends with death, it is only after passion has been renounced; and the death of Julie is Christian—as far as Rousseau is able to make it so. In a letter to his publisher, by the way, he insists at length on his own Protestantism and that of his characters; but without impugning his sincerity, it may be suspected that his ‘Calvinism’ concentrated on the Supreme Being as easily as it

<sup>1</sup> A quotation here, an allusion there, show that Rousseau was well acquainted with Petrarch, the real inventor of a feeling for nature and of the poetry of solitude.

<sup>2</sup> Let me repeat that the famous love of Abélard and Héloïse is the *first historical example* of the kind of passion dealt with in these pages. In the Latin *Funerary Hymn* for Héloïse—composed perhaps by herself—the woman lover beseeches as follows:

Relieve me of my cross,  
Lead me to the light,  
And give my soul release!

Whereupon the chorus of nuns sings:

Let them have respite from their labour,  
And from their painful love!  
Union they besought with those who dwell in heaven.  
Even now are they in sanctuary with the Saviour.

Abélard returned this passion rather poorly. But his extremely heretical theology is akin on essential matters to the spiritual doctrine of the Cathars. And in his *Lamentations* he gives voice to the same loud cry as Romanticism and Tristan: *Amoris impulsio, culpae iustificatio*.



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seemed to overlook Christ. This does not mean that the style of the novel is not most enjoyable. In this respect, indeed, *La Nouvelle Héloïse* is the only novel worthy of comparison with *L'Astrée*. Its clear-sighted psychology, too, is admirable. Moral 'Rousseauism' is not to be judged by attributing to the author the beliefs of his characters. If Rousseau was the first to depict such errors, it was because he had suffered from them more than most people and because he was strongly resolved to get away from them. But the moral of the story is commonly overlooked, and the tone, the emotional content, and certain weaknesses which a romantic style fosters, are all that we notice. Evidently Rousseau was no more taken in by the 'religion' of love than Petrarch had been at the end of his life. Once Julie is married and she analyses the past common to her lover and herself,<sup>1</sup> there could not be a piece of closer reasoning, albeit feminine, than she employs in tracking down the deliberate confusion of eros with agape.

'Virtue is so essential to our hearts that when once true virtue has been forsaken we fashion another to our own liking, and hold to it perhaps the more strongly for having chosen it ourselves.'

Yet there is good reason for believing that the atmosphere of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, so fresh to the eighteenth century, had a power of contagion which the author's moral was quite unable to weaken. And it is in this contagious power that the myth unquestionably reappears—enfeebled, ashamed, and embarrassed, but, thanks to an indefinable funereal shudder, recognizable enough through the veil of virtuous tears. Hardly has Saint-Preux had his 'expectations' fulfilled than<sup>2</sup> he begins gloomily to doubt.

'No [he says], it is not those transports that I most regret. Ah, no! Take away if you must those intoxicating favours for which I would lay down my life a thousand times, but *give me back everything else, all that has a thousand*

<sup>1</sup> Part III, Letter XVIII.

<sup>2</sup> Part I, Letter LV.

## ‘LA NOUVELLE HÉLOÏSE’

*times obliterated them.* Give me back that close union of soul. . . . Julie, please tell me: can it be that previously I did not love you, or is it that I now love you no longer? What a doubt!’

The ambiguity of his sigh frightens him, and yet he goes on to admit with a kind of vexation which he barely conceals: ‘My feelings for you have become more calm, it is true, but also more affectionate, and, moreover, of a different kind. . . . The sweetness of friendship moderates the frenzy of love.’ The Tristan part of him comes to life once he has been guilty of the ‘fault’ of possessing the beloved, and it would readily forgo the ‘calm sweetness’ he speaks of. He too has wanted to burn, and to keep his desire unsatisfied. He too is going to invent fresh and altogether gratuitous *obstructions*—excuses for parting and situations voluptuously hopeless. That is why there is the insistence—painful and, coming at this moment, somewhat overdone, I feel—on the plebeian origins of Saint-Preux, which are held to exclude all possibility of a legal union. That is why, too, social prejudice is assimilated to the exigencies of a virtue declared to be religious *ad hoc*. But the unavowable motives of the confusion are readily discernible. In the twelfth century chastity was ordained by courtly love; now chastity has become a middle-class custom. But, whether one or the other is being deferred to, what is really at work is the myth. In the letter already quoted, where Julie recalls the trials they have had together, she also describes as a ‘holy ardour’ the chaste love that ravished them—notwithstanding that as such it was already open to being condemned—but ‘a crime’, ‘horrors’, ‘corruption’, are the names she gives to this same love when she considers that stage of it which began with the gift of her physical self. Clearly, the fault they care about is the infringement of *cortezia*, not the infringement of the middle-class virtue which they all too often invoke. I might go on: the exegesis of *Tristan* could easily be repeated for *La*

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*Nouvelle Héloïse*. In both, obstruction produces a same interaction. There is, however, this decisive difference: Rousseau ends with marriage—that is to say, with the triumph of the world as sanctified by Christianity—whereas the legend glorified in death the complete dissolution of terrestrial ties.

## XV

### GERMAN ROMANTICISM

THE state of mind of the lovers in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* is sentimental, not mystical.<sup>1</sup> Yet it was by taking this state of mind as a starting-point that Romanticism set out to recover a primitive mysticism with which it was unacquainted, but the sacred and fatal power of which it grew aware of in flashes.

I have traced the gradual degradation of the myth as it passed from Thomas's *Tristan* via Petrarch and *L'Astrée* down to French classical tragedy. Little by little it was made humane and broken up into components less and less mysterious. Finally Racine felled it, though not before he had suffered a most grievous wound in the course of his struggles with the dark angel. Then Don Juan sprang on the stage, and from Molière to Mozart the myth underwent a major eclipse. But with the appearance of Rousseau's novel, which was produced on the margin, so to speak, of the eighteenth century, we are launched upon a new journey, a journey over the same road, but in the opposite direction.

<sup>1</sup> It may be Rousseau's fault, or more likely that of the French poetical movement known as *Symbolisme*, but nowadays many ladies imagine that 'mystical' means 'sentimental'—stained glass, blue shadows, arpeggios, mental somnolence, sensual reverie!

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Via *Wertber*—a retort to the *Héloïse*, which, in ending far more badly, is closer to the original model—we come to Jean Paul, Hölderlin, and Novalis. Amid the commotion of the French Revolution, the Terror, and the ensuing European wars, it became possible to make certain admissions and a certain anguish was enabled to proclaim its true nature. For the first time the worship of Night and of Death rose up into the field of lyric *awareness*. Hardly had Napoleon been overcome than Europe was invaded by a more insidious tyranny, which lasted till the day Wagner caused the myth all at once to stand forth to its full height and charged with its full virulence. Music alone could utter the unutterable, and music forced the final secret of *Tristan*.

It is not my intention to enumerate the countless manifestations of the myth in European literature, chiefly in recent times. I wish only to mark the stages of its alterations, and to resolve some merely apparent contradictions. There is no need to bring forward every piece of evidence for the statement that without exception all the German romantics revived the courtly theme, the theme of unhappy mutual love.<sup>1</sup> Even if the quotation of a few selected passages, which I shall leave to speak for themselves, looks like special pleading—because agreeing so perfectly with my account of the myth—these passages will prove more eloquent than any commentary.

Here is a letter to Hölderlin from his Diotima:

‘Last evening I reflected for a long time about passion. No doubt *the passion of supreme love is never fulfilled here below!* Be sure to understand my feeling: to seek *this* satis-

<sup>1</sup> In 1808 A. W. von Schlegel began a modernized version of *Tristan*. Many others—among them Rückert (1788–1866), Immermann (1796–1840), Platen (1796–1895)—followed suit with poems or poetic dramas. Platen’s poem begins: ‘He whose eyes have once beheld beauty is already marked out for death.’

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faction would be madness. *To die together!* (But silence! That seems like over-excitement, and yet it is so true!) Such is the only fulfilment. But we have sacred duties in this lower world. We are left with nothing but the most perfect confidence in one another and faith in that all-powerful divinity of Love which, though invisible, will go on guiding us for ever and will for ever strengthen our union.<sup>1</sup>

I quote next from the private diary of Novalis:

‘It occurred to me while seated on the tomb [of his betrothed] that my death could provide mankind with an example of everlasting fidelity and in a way establish that it is possible to love as I have loved. . . .

‘When pain is being shunned, that is a sign that one no longer wants to love. Whoever loves must everlastingly remain aware of the surrounding void, and keep the wound open. May God grant that I shall preserve this pain which is exquisitely dear to me. . . .

‘Our vows were not exchanged for this world.’

And here are some of the maxims of Novalis:

‘All passions end like a tragedy. Whatever is finite ends in death. All poetry has a tragic element.

‘A union formed even unto death is a marriage bestowing on each a companion for Night. It is in death that love is sweetest. Death appears to one still alive as a nuptial night, the heart of sweet mysteries.

‘The intoxication of the senses may be related to love as sleep is to life. It is not the better part, and a man of strength must always prefer waking to sleeping.’

The following two passages strike a truly Manichaean note:

‘We must keep God and Nature apart. God has nothing to do with Nature: He is its goal, the substance in which it must eventually be harmonized.

‘We are spirits that have come out of God; we are

<sup>1</sup> Italics in the original.

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divine seed. One day we shall become even as our Father Himself.'<sup>1</sup>

*Hymnen an die Nacht* renew the theme of the 'Dawn' poems of the troubadours. Dark Eros beseeches that morning shall not be born again:

'May thy spiritual fire devour my body; may I be closely united with thee in an ethereal embrace, and then may our nuptial night endure for ever and ever.'

And there might be quoted all those works of Tieck's in which love is termed 'a sickness of desire, a divine apathy.'<sup>2</sup> To extol a death undergone deliberately for the sake of love and in order to be absorbed into the divine—such was the deep religious purpose of the new Albigensian heresy called German Romanticism. Death is the ideal goal of 'lofty men' in Jean Paul's *Die unsichtbare Loge*. In Novalis death blends with love. Kleist made of it 'the one fulfilment' possible for 'a supreme passionate love' to which the body would not lend itself. But poets were not alone in succumbing to the appeal of a nocturnal other world; a philosopher such as Schubert speculated on the *Nachtseite* of existence. Fichte himself defines a love in-essence-impossible—the true love that rejects any object whatever in order that it may launch into the infinite. He says it is 'a desire for something altogether *unknown*, the existence of which is disclosed solely by the need of it, by a discomfort, and by a void that is in search of whatever will fill it, but that remains unaware of whence fulfilment may come'.

<sup>1</sup> The painter Otto Runge had a Manichaean view of the world also. In a vast undertaking which he projected, 'The Four Seasons', he intended to depict the four seasons of the spirit—Morning, infinite illumination of the universe; Day, infinite form of the created; Evening, infinite negation of existence at the beginning of the universe; Night, infinite depths of the knowledge of God, the Absolute Existence.

<sup>2</sup> Tieck in *Sternbald* tells the story of the troubadour Geoffrey Rudel, and in *Phantasus* and elsewhere dwells at length on the characteristics of courtly love.

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Hoffmann voices an identical view when he names this *unknown* something 'poetry'.

'And now [he says] there shoots up, like a pure celestial flame giving out warmth and light but not burning, all the ineffable felicity of the higher life, born in the innermost recesses of the soul. The spirit puts out a thousand feelers, every one vibrating with desire. It weaves its net around *her* who has appeared, and she is his . . . *and she is never his*, for the thirst of his aspiration is ever slakeless.'

In German Romanticism the Western mind set out again on the venture previously undertaken by the unitive mystics; it adopted the old heresy of passion and sought to achieve the ideal transgression of all limitations and the negation of the world through extreme desire. On every side the scattered components of the myth reappeared and came together ready for Wagner, who, in fashioning them into a final synthesis, was the one and only poet who dared exhibit the myth for what it is. We should not be surprised to find that the first poem inspired by recollection of the Cathars and Catharist mysticism is the work of a most thoroughgoing romantic—Lenau's epic *Die Albiger*. The following lines from this poem form a kind of profession of faith of that 'new religion' dreamed of by Novalis and his friends:

The age of Christ, now screened from us by God,  
This age also will pass.  
The New Alliance will be broken;  
And then our God we shall behold as Spirit:  
There shall be celebrated the Alliance Everlasting.  
*Spirit is God!* That almighty cry will go resounding  
Like joyful thunder through the springtime night!

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### XVI

## STENDHAL, OR THE FIASCO OF THE SUBLIME

During the Revolution and the Empire there was no energy to spare in France for speculation in the realm of the spirit. There was no 'new religion', no romantic philosophers,<sup>1</sup> and little or no metaphysics, little or no fancy. In France Romanticism failed to go beyond the sphere of individual psychology. It was on that account the more clear-sighted, and within its narrower purview came more swiftly than the German to distressful conclusions. Certainly André Chénier sings like a true romantic of

*L'enthousiasme errant, fils de la pâle Nuit.*

And Chateaubriand's famous invocation: 'Arise swiftly, longed-for tempest, and bear René away to the expanses of another life!' is the unmistakable voice of the passion of Night. But no mystic dawn glowed on the spiritual horizon and no real joy in love appeared at the summit of these transports. The self was never transcended, and it rejected the ultimate illusion of a cosmic release. It fell back, disenchanted, and set to analysing its own sadness and conscious ineffectuality. French Romanticism was mature, disillusioned, and—I am tempted to say—too rigorous. By the side of it, that of Jean Paul and Novalis must seem merely callow. The attraction of death excites the German eagerness for life; perhaps this is because among the Germans this attraction is more simple and connected with a stronger assurance of the next world. French Romanticism has been the poorer for its eloquent scepticism, its fear of seeming ingenuous, its contempt for the prolific vulgarity

<sup>1</sup> Not till a century later did one appear—Bergson, the disciple of Schelling.



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in which the best German poets deliberately revel notwithstanding their nostalgia!<sup>1</sup> Chateaubriand's René amuses himself one day by dropping willow leaves one by one into a stream and endowing with an idea each leaf that the stream carries away. He watches intently the way the leaves go. The reader feels he is reading some German poet, and expects that all the world's treasure will presently be exhibited. But swiftly the eighteenth-century Frenchman grows aware of how he is behaving and thinks it ridiculous. 'So it is to this depth of puerility that man's magnificent mind can sink!' The 'magnificent mind' therefore ends up with an epigram: 'Do many men really bind their future to things as worthless as my willow leaves?' The remainder of the admirable paragraph, down to the invocation of the tempest, will repay reading.<sup>2</sup>

In France, accordingly, the myth, deprived of external shapes, became what it always must be in essence—a voluptuous destruction of the self by the self. 'We have learned better without having experienced enjoyment', René says. 'We still harbour desires, but no illusions. We dwell with a full heart in an empty world.' Thereupon woman herself ceased to be the indispensable symbol of the nostalgia of passion. In Sénancour's *Obermann* the obstruction is entirely within: it is the duality of a self unable to achieve either vindication or dissolution, unable either to possess or to be possessed. Tristan did not love Iseult for

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the portrait in Novalis's diary of Sophie von Kühn, his former betrothed, who died at sixteen. He recalls her favourite dishes and notes that she liked wine. A Frenchman shrugs his shoulders at such childishness.

<sup>2</sup> In connexion with Chateaubriand's invocation, the Song of Songs says: 'Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out'; and Cantico XXVI by Saint John of the Cross runs:

Come, South Wind, that awakenest love,  
Blow through my garden,  
And let its odours flow.

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herself, but for love of the Love that her beauty *mirrored* for him. Yet he was unaware of not loving her, and his passion was straightforward and eager. But René, and especially Obermann, cannot even believe in an image of love; they have realized that the drama is taking place inside the self, and is being fought out between the intolerable laws of finite terrestrial existence and the desire for a fatal but divinizing transcendence of human limitations.

Seldom, however, did the French romantics attain to this bold, arid, and exact self-knowledge, which is closer to a negative mysticism than might be supposed. Most of them reverted to the illusions of human love, without being able to recapture the vigorous simplicity of the myth. They refined amazingly on the traditional 'pretexts' for the partings of lovers. From Balzac's *Le Lys dans la vallée*—at the most artless extreme—to Constant's *Adolphe*—at the most self-conscious—the pretext is made in turn marriage and honour, social duty, virtue, the lover's melancholy or some religious scruple on his part, and finally his avowed narcissism. The myth grew more internal as the obstruction invoked broke up and was dissolved in a sceptical criticism. Meanwhile, morality was degenerating and social life losing the last vestiges of the 'sacred'.

Of this process, which completed the 'profanation' of the myth, the best illustration is Stendhal. A man of the eighteenth century who had felt the impress of Romanticism, he moved in highly sceptical circles.

He was a man tormented by the wish for passion; he had discovered in his 'soul'—that is to say, in a yearning after the sublime—the void spoken of by Fichte, the insatiable call of the unknown, and, above all, of the Unknown Woman that alone will fill this void. It seemed to him that to love passionately would be indeed to live. He imagined quite sincerely that his longing was physical, and trotted out his own little materialistic explanation of it. Had he

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been told that what he felt was the working of the myth upon his mind, a habit inherited from European culture, and in particular from literature, he would have roared with laughter; for he was convinced that mysticism and religion were things of the past. But he had to admit that his wish to experience passion, that even passion itself, were frowned upon alike by his reason and by the scepticism which then prevailed around him. Hence his feeling that he must somehow justify himself. Hence his famous treatise, *De l'Amour* (1822). The opening words of the preface betray that it is a controversial work.

'Although it deals with love, this little book is not a novel, and above all contains none of the distractions of a novel. It is simply an accurate and scientific treatise on a type of madness which is very rare in France.'<sup>1</sup>

And to this madness Stendhal gives the name of 'passion-love'.

He declares that there are four kinds of love—passion, sympathy-love, sensual love, and vanity love. It is only the first which finds grace in his eyes. He accounts for it by means of a theory of crystallization. 'I call "crystallization" that process of the mind which discovers fresh perfections in its beloved at every turn of events.' Thus in the salt mines of Hallein, near Salzburg, if a bough stripped of its leaves is dropped into the depths of a disused working, it is picked out two or three months later 'spangled with a vast number of shimmering, glittering diamonds'. On this theory, falling in love is to endow a woman with perfections she does not in the least possess. And why do we do this? Because we need to love, and because the only thing that can be loved is beauty. In more simple language, crystallization is the process by which a man idealizes the woman he loves.

I believe it was Ortega y Gasset<sup>2</sup> who first pointed out

<sup>1</sup> Translations by Vyvyan Holland (London, 1928).

<sup>2</sup> *Über die Liebe*, op. cit.

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that this famous theory makes passionate love a mere *delusion*. 'Not that passion is held to err often', Ortega adds, 'but that it is deemed to be in itself an error. . . . Stendhal's case is pretty obvious: he did not truly love, and, above all, he never was truly loved.' Tristan loved, Don Juan was loved; but a man who had nothing in common with the former except nostalgia and nothing in common with the latter except inconstancy was led to describe love as 'a soul-sickness'—in the pure tradition of Antiquity except for his saying that in being afflicted with this sickness he felt happy. Thus, in *De l'Amour*, Stendhal is a doctor studying in his own person the symptoms and progress of a malady he does not consider likely to be fatal. The whole difference between his 'crystallization' and the idealization of *cortezia* lies in this—that Stendhal is aware that there must be a decrystallization, a return to the state in which the beloved is viewed as she actually is. In his opinion, the antidote to the love-potion is inconstancy. Tragedy is being turned into farce.

A striking feature of his book is that, at the same time as it is vivacious, accurate, and at times profound, it is altogether pessimistic, inasmuch as he is dealing with a delusion and is disconsolate at having found out that this is what it is. But he never pauses to wonder where his pessimism comes from, notwithstanding that it is contrary to the philosophy of life he had elaborated for himself. He notes, it is true:

'Pleasure does not leave half the impression that pain does, and in the second place, apart from this drawback in the amount of emotion produced, *sympathy* is only excited about half as much by a picture of happiness as it is by one of misfortune.'

And again:

'A mind made for passion feels in the first place that this happy life [marriage] *irks him*, and perhaps, also, that it only gives him a few very commonplace ideas.'

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A little further on he says:

‘There are very few mental afflictions in life that are not rendered precious by the *emotion* which they excite.’

This is true. We like pain, and happiness does rather bore us. To you, that may seem quite natural, but to a Hindoo or a Chinese it is surprising, and were a citizen of classical Greece to reappear among us he too would find it curious. How have we acquired this curious like and dislike? Are they not unnatural? Once again Stendhal does not ask; for he is not in a position to answer. As a crude materialist—the crude are the best: they are the most straightforward—he boldly suppresses the whole problem, thanks to his theory of crystallization, his theory of a delusion. In his opinion, passion is to be accounted for by a delusion propitious to desire. ‘This phenomenon’, he says, ‘arises from the promptings of Nature which urge us to enjoy ourselves and drive the blood to the head.’ There you are! A man’s faculties become clouded, and they set to ‘crystallizing’. But it is not explained how instinct decides to produce the delusion requisite for this crafty process—I mean, instinct alone, left to itself.

Like Ortega y Gasset, I think in the first place that Stendhal’s explanation is inaccurate as regards the facts. There is one love which, far from producing delusion, is able to recognize in the beloved his or her real though hidden virtues. Secondly, his solution seems of the verbal type. For to say that passion is a delusion—as it may be sometimes—does not explain how the delusion arises. Neither instinct nor nature is in the habit of promoting delusions of this kind. If there is a delusion, it can only be a product of the mind. The truth is that Stendhal fell victim to a spiritual experience that went beyond what his materialistic beliefs could cope with. Yet he was a contented victim; and that is why he did not push his inquiry further. His book *De l’Amour* really bears witness to the dread which invaded his self-possessed mind in the presence of the myth

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—not that he actually wished for release from this myth, but that he had lost the clue to understanding it.

However, it must not be supposed that Stendhal in the course of his inquiry did not more than once 'get hot'. He devotes two chapters to love in Provence in the twelfth century, and he reproduces in an appendix the rules of courtly love.<sup>1</sup> 'A singular civilization', he says. And then he ponders for a bit. It looks as if he must suspect something. But no. 'I could quote', he goes on, 'twenty anecdotes to show the prevalence in the Provence of that time of a *bigb-minded and romantic gallantry between the two sexes on strict principles of justice*. . . .' And in the next chapter he of course does not fail to quote all twenty anecdotes.

## XVII

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Now fades the world with all its glammers,  
Life in holiest loving, ne'er more to awaken,  
Truest, deepest soul's desire.

Away in the night to draw thee hence,  
Where delusion's dreaded dream should vanish,  
With thee to drink eternal love;  
With me ever made one,  
Thee unto death I doomed.

The man who put such statements into *Tristan und Isolde* knew that passion is more than a delusion. He understood that it is one of the fundamental decisions open to a human being, a choice exercised in favour of Death and directed

<sup>1</sup> François Raynouard (1761–1836) and Claude Fauriel (1772–1844) had recently brought about a revival of medieval studies in France.

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by the faith that Death is release from a world under the sway of evil. But the boldness shown in *Tristan und Isolde* is of a kind that can only be tolerated owing to a complete misunderstanding, a misunderstanding which, in being built up and maintained by a sort of social consensus, is tantamount to a blindness at once obstinate and unconscious. The assertion has so often been made by qualified persons that in the end the world has come to believe that Wagner is dealing with sensual desire. In the face of all the flagrant evidence to the contrary which the play affords, the belief is significant. It indicates the *social necessity* of myths, of deceits which society puts forth in self-defence out of a wish to preserve the established forms of its organization, even while the individuals of whom it consists surrender semi-consciously (and under cover of withstanding them) to the passions threatening its ruin.

In writing *Tristan*, Wagner transgressed the taboo. He *said* everything—admitted everything, not only in the words of his poem, but still more in the notes of his score. He deals with Night and the dissolution of forms as well as of beings, with the release of desire, with desire become anathema, and with the tremendously plaintive and blessed twilight glory of the spirit after it has been rescued at the price of a fatal wound inflicted on the body. But in order to be accepted, the malevolent content of his message had to be denied. At all costs this content had to be travestied, and given some tolerable interpretation according to common sense. The overwhelming mystery of Night and of bodily destruction was declared to be the ‘sublimation’ of a poor secret of broad day—the attraction of the sexes, the purely animal law which the body obeys; what society needs in order to procreate and to consolidate itself, what the middle class needs in order to grow aware of being alive. That this was done so quickly does not testify to any exceptional social vitality; rather the operation was facilitated by the frivolousness of the ordinary theatre-going

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public, by its clumsy sentimentality, and—frankly—its wonderful ability not to hear what is being sung. Hence Wagner's *Tristan* can be performed with perfect impunity to audiences whom it greatly moves, so strong is the widespread assurance that *nobody will credit its message*.

The play opens with a monumental evocation of the powers that rule the world of Day—the hate and pride, and the barbarous and sometimes even criminal violence, of feudal honour. Isolde wishes to avenge the affront she has suffered. The potion she gives to Tristan is intended to bring about his death, but a death disallowed by Love, a death in accordance with the laws of Day and of revenge—brutal, accidental, and devoid of mystical significance. The highest Minne, however, causes Brengain to make a mistake that can preserve Love. For the death-potion she substitutes the drink of initiation. Hence the one embrace which conjoins Tristan and Isolde as soon as they have drunk is the solitary kiss of the Catharist sacrament, the *consolamentum* of the Pure! From that moment the laws of Day, hate, honour, and revenge, lose all power over their hearts. The initiated pair enter the nocturnal world of ecstatic release. And Day, coming back with the royal procession and its discordant flourish of trumpets, is unable to recapture them. At the end of the ordeal which it compels them to undergo—this is their passion—they have already foreseen the *other* death, the death that will alone fulfil their love.

The second act is the passion song of souls imprisoned in material forms. When every obstruction has been overcome, and the lovers are alone together in the dark, carnal desire still stands between them. They are together, and yet they are two. The 'und' of *Tristan und Isolde* is there to indicate their duality as creatures. Here music alone can convey the certitude and substance of their twin nostalgia for one-ness; music alone can harmonize the plaint of the two voices, and make of it a single plaint in which there is already being sounded the reality of an ineffable other



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world of expectation. That is why the leitmotiv of the love duet is already that of death.

Once again Day returns. The treacherous Melot<sup>1</sup> wounds Tristan. But by now passion has triumphed. It wrests away the apparent victory of Day. The wound through which life flows out is passion's pledge of a supreme recovery—that recovery of which the dying Isolde sings once she has cast herself upon Tristan's corpse in an ecstasy of the 'highest bliss of being'.

Initiation, passion, fatal fulfilment—the three mystic moments to which Wagner, with a genius for simplification, saw that he could reduce the three acts of the play, express the underlying significance of the myth, a significance kept out of sight even in the medieval legends by a host of epic and picturesque detail. Nevertheless, the art form adopted by Wagner renews the possibility of 'misunderstanding'. The story of Tristan had now to be in the form of an *opera* for two reasons connected with the very essence of the myth. Even as the sin of the first man, and of every man, brings time into the world; and even as the transgression of the rules of chaste love by the legendary lovers turned the song of the troubadours into a romance<sup>2</sup>—so the powers of Day, when brought forward in the first act, introduce struggle and duration, the material of a *play*. But a play does not allow everything to be stated, for the religion of passion is 'in essence lyrical'. Hence *music* alone is equal to conveying the transcendental interaction, the wildly contradictory and contrapuntal character of the passion of Night, which is the summons of uncreated Day. European music has been defined as the emotional harmony of opposites—in musical terminology, counterpoint. It is the expression of a cruel duality, which, although per-

<sup>1</sup> Melot is the informer, a character constantly figuring in courtly poems. The troubadours called him the *losengier*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Book II, §10, p. 124. A romance is a poem which no longer expresses a moment, but duration.

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manent at the level of life, vanishes in the luminous grace beyond physical death. Now, a play completed by music is an opera. Hence it is not by chance that both the *Tristan* myth and the *Don Juan* myth have received full expression only in operatic form. If Mozart and Wagner have produced the masterpieces of musical drama, it is thanks to a previous affinity that links this form of artistic expression with the subject each of them took. Music alone speaks worthily of tragedy, of whom she is mother and daughter.

However, in the case of *Tristan* the plastic share in a stage production comes to raise a new obstruction to the direct apprehending of the myth. Actors, the costumes they wear, and the scenery,<sup>1</sup> all keep attention focused on reality, demand the presence of 'day', and fatally contradict the profound significance of the action. So long as our eyes are fixed on the stage, we are at the mercy of terrestrial shapes. There, all too visibly before us, are a fat woman and a mighty warrior who are both being a prey to the anguish of desire. But let us shut our eyes, and at once the play is illuminated. The orchestra describes broadly the boundaries of an entirely internal tragedy. The melodies in their distressing morbidity disclose a world in which carnal desire has become no more than an ultimate and impure apathy of souls in process of disembodiment. Only the sorrowful light of the third act—the yellowish obsession of the fevered—is able to give our eyes the profound sense that the lovers are being exiled into ecstasy. Because artificial and over-crude, this lighting successfully heralds the extinction of day and shows that dawn has already become no more than a dusk being vainly intensified.

Another critical commonplace—incidentally quite at variance with the one according to which *Tristan* is a

<sup>1</sup> Especially the realistic scenery which producers always insist on using—the decoration of the tent aboard ship in Act I, the painted ivy on the walls of the castle in Act II. This is precisely where extremely simple, abstract scenery is called for.

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glorification of sensual desire—is about Schopenhauer's alleged influence over Wagner. Whatever Nietzsche and even Wagner himself may have thought, it seems to me that this influence is greatly exaggerated. A composer of Wagner's calibre does not put 'ideas' to music. No doubt he obtained out of Schopenhauer some phrases which he used in his poem, and an intellectual coherence that justified his giving the action certain internal movements—that is all, and it is not of great interest. The *askesis*, the negation of the created world, the identification of sexual attraction with a will-to-live that clouds the understanding—all the mystical element that has rashly been called Buddhist, Wagner had no need to learn from any one. It is because he carried it pulsating within his own breast that he was the first to discover the evidence of it in the symbols of the Minnesänger, in the Manichæan legend of Parzival, and underlying the Christian imagery of the Holy Grail—that sacred stone of Iranians and Cathars, that cup used by Gwyon,<sup>1</sup> the Celtic divinity.

That Wagner restored the mislaid significance of the legend in all its virulence is no contention I am trying to get accepted; it is what the words and music of the opera amply make evident. It is through this opera that the myth was completed. But such an 'end' bears two contradictory meanings—like most terms in the vocabulary of life, since they are used of beings in a position to act, not of inanimate things. 'Completion' means that a being, a myth, or a work has been fully expressed; it also means death. Hence, once 'completed' by Wagner, the myth had lived. *Vixit* Tristan!

And that was the beginning of the era of phantoms.

<sup>1</sup> Gwyon (whence 'guyon' meaning 'guide' in Old French) means the *Führer* who has in his custody the secret of initiation into the way of divinization.

## THE MYTH IS POPULARIZED

### XVIII

## THE MYTH IS POPULARIZED

The myth took *the way of poetry*.

Edgar Allen Poe begot Baudelaire, who begot *Symbolisme*, which begot mandragora, disembodied women, *jeunes Parques*, hardly femininized appearances of 'escapes'—as gas is said to escape—fissures in reality, flights into dreams. The tradition became enfeebled, intellectualized, sophisticated. The way was decidedly too narrow for a man to commit himself to it wholeheartedly, and in fact taking this way was delegated to some detached human faculties. *Askesis* became very truly optional.

The myth also took *the way of the novel*.

But this way soon opened on to a crowded main road, such as people stroll along on Sundays to watch the fine big cars go by and to complain of the speeding. Balzac's *Le Lys dans la vallée*, Constant's *Adolphe*, Fromentin's *Dominique*, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*, André Gide's *La Porte étroite*, Proust's *Un Amour de Swann*, are successive steps by the French in psychological dissociation, in the degradation of the external obstruction, and in the conscious admission (which, because conscious, is alien to romance) that the obstruction is purely internal and subjective—an admission religious in the case of Gide, quasi-physiological in that of Proust. Parallel to these steps are D'Annunzio's *Trionfo della Morte*—admirable as a commentary on Wagner—Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, and most of the great Victorian novels, especially *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*; and in our own time the Platonistic novels of Charles Morgan.

But, following Wagner, exceptional pieces of literature become less significant of the myth's descent into manners

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than are mass-produced novels, popular stage successes, and, above all, films. The real tragic element in our period has been scattered over mediocrity. Thereupon to be truly serious implies an understanding, and the rejection or acceptance, of what moves or stirs the masses—an understanding of the broad anonymous rivers that sweep detached individuals along with a force the mind still finds it repugnant to gauge. The process whereby our literature, whether middle-class or 'proletarian', has come to consist mainly of novels, and of love stories at that, corresponds precisely to an invasion of the contemporary mind by the now altogether profaned content of the myth. The myth, indeed, must cease to be the real thing once its sacred framework is removed and the mystic secret which it both divulged and kept back is vulgarized and popularized. The *claim to passion* put forward by the romantics becomes a vague yearning after affluent surroundings and exotic adventures, such as a low grade of melodramatic novel can satisfy symbolically. That the yearning is entirely meaningless becomes evident as soon as we realize how impossible it is for the readers of these novels to imagine a mystic reality, an *askesis*, or any effort on the part of the mind to throw off its sensual fetters; and yet courtly passion had no other purpose, its language no other key. Purpose and key have been lost and forgotten; and passion, although the need of it still disturbs us, is now a mere sickness of instinct, seldom fatal, usually poisonous and depressing, and quite as degraded and degrading in comparison with the Tristan myth as the consequences of dipsomania, for example, must be in comparison with the divine intoxication described in the poetry of the Arab mystics.

The drama has been more instructive. Under the Second Empire the French middle class made a last attempt to accommodate within its social framework the lawless workings of traditional passion. It sought to make passion normal enough to bear being expressed conventionally and

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therefore able to receive the assent of the social order; and the effect of the attempt was shown in the French drama. The 'eternal triangle' which served as a model for most French playwrights down to 1914 simply reduces the Tristan myth to proportions suitable for modern society. King Mark is become the Cuckold; Tristan, the junior lead or gigolo; and Iseult, the idle, dissatisfied wife who reads novels. Here again two moralities confront one another. The felon barons of the legend are now the supporters of the established order. They defend middle-class marriage, the laws of inheritance, convention, and a settled state of affairs. They side with the husband, and are therefore slightly ridiculous. But it is the other morality which invariably triumphs—even though at the price of a pistol shot. This is romantic morality, holding the claims of love to be indefeasible and implying the superiority from a 'spiritual' standpoint of mistress over wife. As for the love-potion, it is now romantically called 'irresistible passion', and the supporters of the established order wisely lump belief in it with whatever they contemptuously refer to as a 'literary' attitude. Eventually even, it was no longer attempted to dispute that the distillation of the old love-potion obtains encouragement from its victims. Proust, for example, devotes hundreds of pages to a minute analysis of the way this encouragement operates and of the unconscious stratagems to which it resorts.

I have called all this recent literature middle-class. Indeed, because its trend is invariably against the middle class, it has had the effect of contributing to the stability of the established order. Literature is thus employed—unconsciously of course—to ensure that the subversive desires of the individual mind shall be volatilized in sensual reverie. It is true that the institution of marriage comes off rather badly, but that does not matter, since the middle class (especially on the Continent) is well aware that this institution is no longer grounded in morality or religion,

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but rests securely upon financial foundations—prospects of inheritance, dowries, the social position of each party, business connexions, and so on. There is thus a wish *to enjoy* the myth as *cheaply* as possible; and this wish is expressed with complete artlessness in sentimental films.

Art has seldom worked in a more artificial and rhetorical convention than it did in American film studios during the early nineteen-twenties. It was then that the happy ending had its heyday. Every plot had to lead up to a final lingering kiss against a background of roses or rich hangings. The convention was faithful to the myth in the last stage of the latter's downfall. It allowed the complete fusion of two contradictory wishes—the wish that nothing shall be settled and the wish that everything shall be settled, the one romantic, the other middle-class. The profound satisfaction which spectators unfailingly find in a happy ending must be due precisely to its resolving the contradiction of their double wishfulness. For there can be no love story unless love meets with opposition. There is accordingly an abundance of obstructions to the fulfilment of love, and it does not matter how far-fetched they are, because the wish for romanticism renders the spectator impervious to the straining of his credibility. For an hour or two, accordingly, the story can rebound, and we be full of heartfelt suspense, which is what we want. But the obstruction of love must ultimately mean death and a renunciation of terrestrial goods. This we no longer want once we have grown aware of what it is. A plot-maker has therefore to devise the suppression of the obstruction at some point earlier than death, and the result is the ending which novels and films commonly have. Yet the ending must also possess a 'poetical' atmosphere that will conceal the bump back into everyday life, and that will also, as compensation for the way romanticism has been disappointed, fill the middle-class citizen and his wife with a sense of relief. Hence in the modern drama, in the popular novel, and in the films which inces-

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santly resort to the triangular plot, the tragic idealism of the primitive myth has turned into a rather vulgar nostalgia, the idealization of tame desires; and, moreover, these desires are being redirected towards worldly enjoyments, which means that in relation to courtly love they are being completely inverted.

The *religion* of the troubadours lent itself to a very cunning indulgence of *instinct*, instinct being excited by the very insistence on denying it. The equivocal character of the mystical phraseology of heresy thereupon brought into being as early as the thirteenth century a profane rhetoric of passion. And it is the spread of this phraseology in the novel (and in the drama) that in the course of the last hundred years has caused instinct to become the real basis of a rhetoric, the tropes of which now give it a semblance of ideality.

## XIX

## THE GLORIFICATION OF INSTINCT

As the Rose of Guillaume de Lorris was countered by Jean de Meung's, and as Petrarch's crystalline rhetoric was countered by Boccaccio's sensual phantasmagoria, so romanticism has brought about in our time a revolt that would like to believe itself 'primitive'. The object of idealization is no longer feeling, but instinct. I have in mind a school of Anglo-American novelists in revolt against middle-class Puritanism—a school including D. H. Lawrence, Erskine Caldwell, and William Faulkner.<sup>1</sup> These writers seem to be saying in effect:

'We have had enough of being made to suffer for ideas, for ideals, for idealized and perverted little hypocrisies which

<sup>1</sup> L. F. Céline seems to me far more healthy: he laughs.



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no longer take anybody in. You made woman into a kind of divinity—coquettish, cruel, and vampiric. Your fatal women, your adulterous women, and your women made arid by virtue, have emptied life of all delight for us. We shall get our own back on them. Woman is first and foremost a female. We are going to make her drag herself to the domineering male on her belly.<sup>1</sup> Instead of describing courtesy, we shall praise the cunning of animal desire, the complete obsession of the mind by sex. And our vast bestial innocence will rid us of your liking for sin, which is but a disease of the procreative instinct. What you call morality is what makes us nasty, gloomy, and shameful. What you call dirt can purify us. Your taboos are sacrileges on the real divinity, which is Life. And life is instinct released from mind, a great solar power that crushes and magnifies the prolific man, the magnificent unleashed bully.'

One of these prophets has even gone the length of saying: 'I want to be as vital as a cow.'

Possibly this new mystic doctrine of 'Life' has inspired some fine literary work, but it also has a political aspect. In curiously identical guise, it is met with at the origin of a movement no longer needing to be either examined or convicted. This movement calls itself National Socialism, Fascism, or Communism, according to the doctrinal and economic excuses it has employed in order to seize power. It denies the next world, not in order to suppress the gods, but in order to use their thunder in this world. To be divested of moral personality and merged again in the cosmic flux of instinct remains a *theoretical* aspiration for the bards of solar primitiveness; but the *practice* cannot mislead us for a moment. There are no magnificent bullies, only bullies. The idea of beauty, which Lawrence supposed was still firmly operative, is the legacy of a bankrupt period: it is a debt nobody *there* is prepared to honour. The

<sup>1</sup> There is an incident of this kind in Caldwell's *Tobacco Road*.

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totalitarian ruling caste is not going to consider itself accountable to a Platonic 'spirit' that it looks upon as being to blame for all the trouble and as having already paid for this with its life. So much is quite obvious.

It is no less obvious that when under pretence of destroying whatever is artificial—idealizing rhetoric, the mystical ethics of 'perfection'—people seek to swamp themselves in the primitive flood of instinct, in whatever is primeval, formless, and foul, they may imagine they are recapturing real life, but actually they are letting themselves be swept away by a torrent of *waste-matter* pouring from the disintegration of the ancient culture and its myths. Moreover, there is nothing truly primitive about men to-day. The existence of what the current jargon calls heredity, and the Church original sin, means that we have irrevocably lost all direct touch with our origins. To plunge down below our moral rules is, therefore, not to abolish their restraints, but merely to indulge in a more than animal insanity. The mistake lies in supposing that 'the real thing', the longing for which has now become an obsession, is there to be found. It is not lying in wait for us on the far side of a surrender to enervated instinct and resentful flesh. It is not hidden, but lost. The only way to recover it is by building it up afresh, thanks to an effort that shall go against passion—that is to say, by some action, a putting in order, a purification, that will bring us back to the sober mean. Truly to act in this respect is not to escape out of a world deemed diabolical; it is not to kill this hampering body. But neither is it to fire a revolver at spirit on the ground that spirit has deceived us.<sup>1</sup> To act is indeed to recognize that matters must be accepted as they are in the struggle between the spirit and the flesh; it is to strive to surmount the two antagonistic powers, not through their destruction, but by uniting them. Let the spirit come to the aid of the flesh

<sup>1</sup> A Nazi is reported to have said: 'Every time I hear the word "Geist" [spirit] I slip the safety-catch of my revolver.'

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and so recover the support of the flesh, and let the flesh submit to the spirit and thus recover peace. There lies the way.

The Eros of death and the Eros of life—each conjures up the other, and each has no true end or ending but the other, which it has been striving to destroy! And so everlastingly till all life and all spirit shall have been consumed. Such is the pursuit undertaken by the man who mistakes himself for a god. It is the last of the motions of passion, and the aggravation of this motion we call war.

## XX

### THE SPREAD OF PASSION INTO EVERY SPHERE

The *social function* of the sacred myth of courtly love in the twelfth century was to order and purify the lawless forces of passion. Its transcendental mysticism secretly directed the yearnings of anguished mankind to the next world, and concentrated them there. No doubt it was a heresy, but a peaceful one, and in some respects productive of a civilizing stability. But its being opposed to the propagation of the species and to war was enough to cause society to persecute it. It was the Roman Church that carried fire and the sword to the provinces where heresy had been installed. In destroying the material shape of this religion, the Church doomed it to spread in a form more dubious and perhaps more dangerous. Tracked down, repressed, and disorganized, heresy soon underwent a thousand distortions. The disorders which it had encouraged in spite of itself, the glorification of human love that was the inversion of its doctrine, its language both essentially and opportunely equivocal, and also open to every kind of abuse—all this was bound to defy the judges of the Inquisition, and

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then to invade the European mind even where still orthodox, and finally, by a kind of irony, to bestow its passionate rhetoric upon the mysticism of the highest saints.

When myths lose their esoteric character and their sacred purpose they take literary form. The courtly myth was peculiarly fitted to do this, since the only way of stating it had been in terms of human love, which were given a mystic sense. Once this mystic sense had vanished, there remained a rhetoric which could express our natural instincts, but not without distorting them imperceptibly in the direction of another world; and this other world, in growing more and more mysterious, answered the need of idealization which the human mind had acquired from a mystical understanding first condemned, then lost. This was the opportunity of European literature, and this alone will account for the sway which literature has exercised from that moment all the way down to our own time, first over the upper classes alone, later over the masses as well—a sway unique in the history of civilizations.

Nevertheless, when the dark forces had been deprived of their sacred element, the French classical age sought to make them at least submit to an artistic style. Romanticism supervened to deal with these ritualistic vestiges. Hence, at the end of the eighteenth century, there occurred the magnification of all that the Tristan myth, and later its literary substitutes, had been intended to *contain*. The middle-class nineteenth century witnessed the spread into the profane mind of a 'death instinct' which had long been repressed in the unconscious, or else directed at its source into the channels of an aristocratic art. And when the framework of society burst—under a pressure exerted from quite another quarter—the content of the myth poured out over everyday life. We were unable to understand this diluted elevation of love. We supposed it to be a new springtime of instinct, a revival of the dionysiac forces which a so-called Christianity had persecuted. The

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whole of modern literature took up the hymn of 'liberation'. Why, then, did literature sound such a melancholy note? How is it that the novel—which for the first thirty years of this century outdistanced all other literary forms—has resulted in no more than a shifting 'and slippery analysis of human doubts and human emptiness? There can be no doubt that by 1930 the novel had run dry of all its sap, and could only recover an ephemeral virulence by putting itself at the service of partisan mystic systems.

The spectacle afforded by contemporary manners does not allow it to be inferred that this was the doom of romanticism. The present breakdown of middle-class marriage is a delayed triumph—perverted, if you like, but nevertheless a triumph—for a profaned passion. But far outside marriage and the realm of sex properly so called, the content of the myth together with its phantoms have now invaded other spheres. Politics, the class war, national feeling—everything nowadays is an excuse for 'passion' and is already being magnified into this or that 'mystic doctrine'. The reason for this is that we have grown incapable of giving up anything for the sake of something better, incapable of regulating our desires, of understanding their character and object, and of keeping their vagaries within bounds. We can no longer express ourselves figuratively.

The last surviving formalities of love have been swept away by war, and I would emphasize the symbolical fact that we have stopped making formal declarations of love at the very time we have allowed wars to begin without any declaration either. We are returning to the age of abduction and rape, though minus the ritual that has surrounded such violence in Polynesia. The gradual profanation of the myth, its conversion into rhetoric, and in turn the dissolving of the rhetoric together with the thorough popularization of its content, can be traced step by step in a sphere at first sight entirely alien to what we have been examining—in the gradual transformation of European warfare and its methods.

*Book Five*

*Love and War*



# I

## HOW THEY ARE SIMILAR

From desire to death via *passion*—such has been the road taken by European romance; and we are all taking this road to the extent that we accept—unconsciously, of course—a whole set of manners and customs for which the symbols were devised by courtly mysticism. And, as I have said, passion means suffering. Therefore, inasmuch as our notion of love comprises our notion of woman, it is linked with a theory of the *fruitfulness of suffering* which encourages or obscurely justifies in the recesses of the Western mind a liking for war.

This peculiar connexion between a certain view of woman and the European conception of war has had profound consequences for morality, education, and politics. In order to deal with the subject in a manner commensurate to its importance, it would be necessary, not only to have a thorough grasp of the matters so far touched upon in these pages, but also to have received a sound military training, and to be acquainted with what psychological research has collected in the course of the last half-century or so regarding 'the fighting instinct' and its relation to the sexual instinct. But in this field an examination of *formal modes* is no less instructive than an inquiry into *causes*, and it is certainly less deceptive. There is no need, for example, to invoke Freudian theories in order to see that the war instinct and eroticism are fundamentally allied: it is so perfectly *obvious* from the common figurative use of language. Let me then consider some similarities in the practice of the *arts* of love and war from the twelfth century down to the present day. I must not be taken, however, to be pre-



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supposing that the transformation of the myth has necessarily been prior to the transformation of warfare, or vice versa.

### II

#### THE WARLIKE LANGUAGE OF LOVE

Already in Antiquity poets used warlike metaphors in order to describe the effects of natural love. 'The god of love is an *archer* who shoots *fatal arrows*. Woman *surrenders* to man, and he *conquers* her because he is the better warrior. The Trojan War was fought for the possession of a woman. And one of the oldest novels we possess—Heliodorus's *Theagenes and Chariclea*, written in the third century—already refers to the '*battles of love*' and to the '*delightful defeat*' suffered by the man who '*falls under the unerring shafts*' of Eros. Plutarch makes it clear that the sexual morals of the Lacedaemonians were determined by their military requirements. The eugenics of Lycurgus, and his detailed laws concerning the relations of husband and wife, had no other aim than to ensure the aggressive vigour of the soldiery.

All this confirms the natural—that is to say, the physiological—connexion between the sexual and fighting instincts. But it would be idle to seek any kinship between the *tactics* of the Ancients and their notion of love. The two fields remained under quite distinct rules, and offered no ground for comparison. But this has not been true in Western Europe since the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The language of love was then enriched with phrases and expressions which had unmistakably been borrowed from the art of giving battle and from contemporary military tactics. In addition to the more or less dim awareness of a

## THE WARLIKE LANGUAGE OF LOVE

common origin, there appeared a close similarity of detail. A lover *besieged* his lady. He delivered *amorous assaults* on her virtue. He *pressed her closely*. He *pursued* her. He sought to *overcome* the final *defences* of her modesty, and to *take them by surprise*. In the end the lady *surrendered to his mercy*. And thereupon, by a curious inversion typical enough of courtesy, he became the lady's *prisoner* as well as her *conqueror*. He became a *vassal* of this *suzerain*, in accordance with the laws of feudal warfare, as if it had been he who suffered *defeat*.<sup>1</sup> It only remained for him to give proofs of his *valour*. So much for polite language. But slang, both military and civil, was rich in words and phrases which were rendered even more significant by their coarseness. And when firearms came into use, they gave rise to countless jokes of *double entendre*. Writers, indeed, delighted to take advantage of the resemblance, for it provided them with an inexhaustible rhetorical topic.

'O, all too fortunate captain [Brantôme writes],<sup>2</sup> who at the front and in the towns have fought and killed so many men who were the foes of God! And O, more and more fortunate still, you who have fought and overcome in many other assaults and bouts such a lovely Lady under the banners of your bed!'

It is not surprising that once such metaphors had *become commonplace* mystical writers should have employed them and transposed them—in the way I have described earlier<sup>3</sup>—to the key of divine love. Francisco de Ossuna—who was steeped in courtly rhetoric and was one of Saint Teresa's favourite authors—writes in his *Ley de Amor*:

<sup>1</sup> The German word for 'defeat' is *Niederlage*, which literally means 'in the position of being on the ground, of lying under'. The French, in saying 'avoir le dessous' for 'having the worst of it', also invoke the sense of 'under'. The *Roman de la Rose*, it may be noted at the same time, uses the symbol of a besieged tower and speaks of 'securing allies in the stronghold'.

<sup>2</sup> *Rodomontades espagnoles*.

<sup>3</sup> Book III, *supra*.

## LOVE AND WAR

‘Do not believe that the battle of love is like other fights in which the clamour and fury of an appalling war prevail on either side; for love fights only by means of caresses and threatens only with tender words. Its arrows and blows are gifts and blessings. Its encounter is a most effective promise. Sighs make up its artillery. Its taking possession is an embrace. Its slaughter consists of giving one’s life for the beloved.’

It was shown earlier that courtly rhetoric began by expressing the *struggle* between Day and Night. The part played by *Death* is of capital importance: it marked the defeat of the world and the victory of the life of light. Love and death were connected by *askesis*, as instinct connects desire and war. But neither the religious origin nor the physiological kinship of the fighting and procreative instincts was enough to determine the *exact* use of warlike phrases in European erotic literature. What does account for everything is that there existed in the Middle Ages a rule actually applicable to the arts of both love and war—the rule called chivalry.

### III

## CHIVALRY : A RULE OF LOVE AND WAR

‘To formalize love’, according to J. Huizinga,<sup>1</sup> ‘is the supreme realization of the aspiration to the life beautiful.’ He is describing the ideals of medieval society.

‘To formalize love [he says again] is a social necessity, a need that is the more imperious as life is more ferocious. Love has to be elevated to the level of a rite. The over-

<sup>1</sup> *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, op. cit., p. 96. I cannot speak too highly of this admirable work.

## CHIVALRY: A RULE OF LOVE AND WAR

flowing violence of passion demands it. Only by constructing a system of forms and rules for the vehement emotions can barbarity be escaped. The brutality and the licence of the lower classes were always fervently, but never very efficiently, repressed by the Church. The aristocracy could feel less dependent on religious admonition, because they had a piece of culture of their own from which to draw their standards of conduct, namely, courtesy.'

I need not recall that courtesy not only owed nothing to the Church, but went against ecclesiastical morality. This in itself should be enough to bring about the revision of many opinions about the spiritual unity of the Middle Ages! But if courtly morality did not succeed in transforming the private behaviour of the upper classes, who continued 'astonishingly rough', at least it played the part of an ideal that made externals very handsome. It triumphed in literature, and succeeded, moreover, in impressing itself upon the most violent reality of the period—I mean, war. At no other time has an *ars amandi* given birth to an *ars bellandi*.

It is not only in the detailed rules of personal combat that the effect of the ideal of chivalry was evident, but also in the fighting of battles, and even in politics. Military formality came to be treated as if it had a kind of religious validity. Men often allowed themselves to be killed in order not to infringe absurd rules. Froissart asserts that the 'Knights of the Star had to swear never to fly more than four acres from the battlefield, through which rule soon afterwards more than ninety of them lost their lives'.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, the requirements of strategy might be sacrificed to aesthetics or courtly honour.

'Some days before the battle of Agincourt [Huizinga says]<sup>2</sup> the king of England, on his way to meet the French army, one evening passed by mistake by the village which the foragers of his army had fixed upon as night quarters.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 86-7.

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. . . The king, "as the chief guardian of the very laudable ceremonies of honour", had just published an order, according to which knights, while reconnoitring, had to take off their coat-armour, because their honour would not suffer knights to retreat, when accoutred for battle. Now, the king himself had put on his coat-armour, and so, having passed it by, he could not return to the village mentioned. He therefore passed the night in the place he had reached, and also made the vanguard advance accordingly.'

There are countless instances where a futile carnage resulted from the attempt to fulfil at great peril vows of an overweening arrogance. Indeed, danger was what knights courted for its own sake, even as on other occasions they showed themselves prompt with excuses for not keeping their word. Courtly casuistry furnished excellent excuses of this kind. It not only ruled morality and law, but also regulated ceremonial, tournaments, hunting, and especially love. Honoré Bonet's *L'Arbre des batailles* is a treatise on the laws of war, which discusses with the help of Biblical texts and articles of Canon Law such questions as: 'If in the course of the fighting a knight loses a piece of armour he has borrowed, does he have to make it good?' 'Is it allowable to fight a battle on a holy day?' 'Is it better to fight after a meal or fasting?' 'In what circumstances is it legitimate for a prisoner of war to escape?'

As for the political aims inspired by the notion of chivalry, they were chiefly—again according to Huizinga—to fight for a universal peace which a union of kings was expected to preserve once it had been won, and to conquer Jerusalem and expel the Turks. Both these aims were chimerical, and nothing shows better how the courtly ideal was in flat contradiction with the 'stern reality' of the age. It represented a pole of attraction for thwarted spiritual aspirations. It was a form of romantic escape at the same time as a brake applied to instinct. The detailed formality of war was devised to check the violent impulses of feudal

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blood, even as the cult of chastity among the troubadours was intended to check the erotic excitement of the twelfth century. Two attitudes to life were formed, so to speak, side by side in the medieval mind—one, pious and ascetic, attracted all moral sentiment; the other, spurred on by a sensuality given over to the devil, went to the opposite extreme. According as one or the other was in the ascendant, there arose a saint or a sinner; but on the whole they balanced one another, though not without now and then a wide swing of the scales.

### IV

## TOURNAMENTS, OR THE MYTH IN ACTION

There was, however, one place where the erotic and fighting instincts were in almost perfect harmony with the ideal courtly rule. This was the strictly circumscribed area of the lists where tournaments were held. There the frenzy of the blood had full play, even though it was under the aegis of a sacred ceremonial and subject to symbolical restraints. A tournament was the sporting equivalent of the mythical function of *Tristan* as this function has been defined in these pages. Passion was to be expressed with all its strength, but also to be veiled religiously so that it might be acceptable to social opinion. A tournament was the physical representation of the myth.

‘Literature did not suffice [Huizinga says]<sup>1</sup> for the almost insatiable needs of the romantic imagination of the age. Some more active form of expression was required. Dramatic art might have supplied it, but the medieval drama in the real sense of the word treated love matters

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 68–9.

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only exceptionally; sacred subjects were its substance. There was, however, another form of representation, namely, noble sports, tourneys, and jousts. Sportive struggles always and everywhere contain a strong dramatic element and an erotic element. In the mediæval tournament these two elements had so much got the upper hand, that its character of a contest of force and courage had been almost obliterated by its romantic purport. With its bizarre accoutrements and pompous staging, its poetical illusion and pathos, it filled the place of the drama of a later age.<sup>1</sup>

Nothing seems to me better able to place us in the dream-like atmosphere of the *Romance of Tristan* than the accounts of tourneys in Chastellain's chronicles and the memoirs of Olivier de La Marche, both men having been historiographers of the gorgeous and chivalric Duchy of Burgundy in the fifteenth century. They succeed in uniting love and death in an artificial and symbolical landscape pervaded by a lofty sadness.

'The hero who serves for love, this is [to quote Huizinga again]<sup>2</sup> the primary and invariable motif from which erotic fantasy will always start. It is a sensuality transformed into the craving for self-sacrifice, into the desire of the male . . . to suffer and to bleed for his lady-love.' The expression and the satisfaction of desire, from having both seemed unattainable, were transmuted into something loftier—a heroic action undertaken for the sake of love. Death thereupon became the only alternative to the fulfilment of desire, and in any event release seemed assured.'

<sup>1</sup> The dramatic function of tournaments may possibly have been one source of modern tragedy. For this tragedy came into being at the very moment tournaments went out of fashion, in a time when their warlike, sporting, and theatrical components were breaking up. In that case, tragedy might be regarded as an 'action' deprived of the *physical* danger implicit in a tournament, but on that account giving all the greater satisfaction to a need of sentimental and spiritual emotion.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

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The ceremonial of the tournaments drew its inspiration from the romances of the Round Table. A Passage of Arms of the fifteenth century is based on a fictitious chivalrous adventure connected with an artificial scene called 'The Fountain of Tears'.

'A fountain is expressly constructed, and beside it a pavilion, where during a whole year a lady is to reside (in effigy, be it understood), holding a unicorn which bears three shields. The first day of each month knights come to touch the shields, and in this way to pledge themselves for a combat of which the "Chapters" of the Passage of Arms lay down the rules. They will find horses in readiness, for the shields have to be touched on horseback. . . .

'The knight should be unknown. He is called "le blanc chevalier", "le chevalier mesconnu", or he wears the crest of Lancelot or Palamedes. The shields of the Fount of Tears are white, violet, and black, and overspread with white tears.'<sup>1</sup>

The erotic factor in tournaments is also shown by the custom according to which a knight carried—like Lancelot—the veil or a fragment of the dress of his lady, and sometimes after the lists handed this to her stained with his blood.

'The Church was openly hostile to tournaments; it repeatedly prohibited them, and there is no doubt that the fear of the passionate character of this noble game, and of the abuses resulting from it, had a great share in this hostility.'<sup>2</sup>

However, when tournaments reached the height of their vogue, it was a sign that chivalry had begun to decline. At the beginning of the fifteenth century—about the time of the Battle of Agincourt—new brutalities drove it into literature, entertainments, and symbolical games. The fifteenth century witnessed the appearance of the foot-soldier; and less than a hundred years later the lanzknechts

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 71.



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introduced from the East the use of the drum. Its hypnotic and discordant beat symbolized the transition from chivalry to the modern art of war. It was a step in the mechanization of warfare. And finally chivalry was killed by the invention of artillery. There is an irony of fate in the fact that Jacques de Lalaing, prototype of the Hainault pattern knight of the fifteenth century, should have been killed by a cannon ball.

Yet the formalities of war and of courtly love had given European ways an impress that did not fade till the present century. The notion of personal valour and of the warlike feats represented by the duel and by prowess (the single-handed combat between two leaders); the notion of regulating the conduct of battles according to a quasi-sacred etiquette; the view that military life must be ascetic (long fasts before the ordeal by battle), rules for settling who should be the victor (he, for example, who *spent the night* on the battlefield), and finally the close parallel between erotic and military symbolism—all that never ceased to determine the modes of making war throughout the ensuing ages. So that any alteration in military tactics may be looked upon as related to an alteration in the notions of love, or vice versa.

## V

### CANNON AND CONDOTTIERI

‘Italy had at no time enjoyed a state of such compleat prosperity and repose as in the year 1490, and some time before and after. The people also had taken advantage of this halcyon season, and been busied in cultivating all their lands, as well as mountains and vallies; and being under no foreign influence, but governed by their own princes. Italy not only abounded with inhabitants and riches, but grew renowned for the grandeur and magnificence of her sove-

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reigns, for the splendor of many noble and beautiful cities; for the seat and majesty of religion, and for a number of great men of distinguished abilities in the administration of public affairs, and of excellent accomplishments in all the sciences and in every noble art. She had also no small share of military glory according to the knowledge and practice of arms in those days.<sup>1</sup>

The military glory had been obtained by *condottieri*. Professional soldiers in the service of princes and popes, they were much less given to making war than to ensuring that war did not take a toll of lives. They were not only adventurers, but skilled diplomatists and astute traders. They knew the price of a soldier. The essence of their tactical practice was to make prisoners and to disorganize the enemy's forces. Sometimes—and this was their supreme achievement—they succeeded in defeating the foe in a truly overwhelming manner: they robbed him of all his strength by buying up his entire army. Only when this was not possible did they have to fight. But, according to Machiavelli, in those days there was nothing dangerous about a battle.

'Fighting invariably takes place on horseback, the soldiers being protected by arms and assured of preserving their lives if taken prisoner. . . . The lives of the defeated are nearly always spared. They do not remain prisoners for long, and their release is obtained very easily. A town may rebel a score of times; it is never destroyed. The inhabitants retain the whole of their property; all they have to fear is that they will be made to pay a levy.'

In its own field—then deemed inferior—this art of war was the expression of a culture admirably humane, of a profound 'civilization', the opposite of a 'militarization'. In Burckhardt's phrase, the State had become a work of art. War itself had grown civilized, to the full extent that such a paradoxical statement can be true. Duels between com-

<sup>1</sup> Francesco Guicciardini, *Storia d'Italia*; translation by Austin Parke Goddard, 1763.

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manders were in honour, and were enough to bring a campaign to a close. For that matter, these duels were no longer a submission to the 'judgement of God', but the triumph of one personality over another. The use of fire-arms was deplored as being incompatible with human dignity; and the condottiere Paolo Vitelli put out the eyes and cut off the hands of some *schiozzettieri* of the enemy, who had been captured, because it seemed to him infamous that a gallant and perhaps noble knight should have been wounded by a common, despised foot-soldier. Love had undergone a similar alteration.

Burckhardt lays stress<sup>1</sup> on the way in which marriages were arranged without fuss, with short engagements, and how a husband's claim on his wife's fidelity was never asserted as strictly as in northern climes. Women of the upper class were as well educated as the men, and enjoyed full moral equality, at a time when exactly the opposite was the case in France and the Empire. And if war had turned into diplomacy in the highest quarters and had become venal in practice, the same was true of love. Courtesans could play a leading part in social life, very much as the *hetaerae* of Ancient Greece had done. The most famous among them were remarkable for being highly cultivated; they wrote and recited verse, played musical instruments, and were excellent conversationalists. This paganizing of the life of sex marked a considerable decline in the influence of *cortezia* and a depreciation of the tragic myth. The Platonism in vogue at the small ducal courts and so well described by Cardinal Bembo and by Baldassare Castiglione (in the dialogues of his *Libro del Cortegiano*) was really, in a refined and thoroughly hedonistic form, the equivalent of what nowadays fills the life of a social gadfly. It was then that 'courtesy' acquired its modern meaning of

<sup>1</sup> J. Burckhardt, *The Civilization of Italy in the Renaissance* (London and Vienna, 1937). This is the latest and most handsome edition of the English translation.

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politeness and good breeding. The view that life was evil had become a thing of the past. And 'the death instinct' had apparently been neutralized.

It was upon this happy, immoral, and entirely peace-loving<sup>1</sup> Italy that the French troops of Charles the Eighth presently descended. The roar of *thirty-six brass cannon* spread panic through the peninsula as if this roar had been the signal of the end of the world. Charles brought with him into Italy, Guicciardini says, 'the seeds of innumerable calamities, horrible events, and changes in all scenes of affairs. For from this passage derived their origin not only changes of states, but also new fashions, new and bloody ways of making war, and diseases unknown till those days.' The peace and concord that had hitherto prevailed in the land were so upset that it was afterwards impossible to restore order and quiet. Not that the Italians had been unaware of the use of artillery, but they despised all these new engines, as I have already mentioned, and as is shown by Ariosto's invective on firearms. The French, Guicciardini continues,

'brought a much handier engine made of brass called *cannon*, which they charged with heavy iron balls. . . . They were planted against the walls of a town with such speed, the space between the shots was so little, and the balls flew so quick, and were impelled with such force, that as much execution was done in a few hours as formerly in Italy in the like number of days. These rather diabolical than human instruments were used not only in sieges, but also in the field.'

Another thing that terrified the Italians was that whereas

<sup>1</sup> It is only fair to recall that killing was very common. But murder remained an individual affair. In the present militarized world, on the other hand, the individual is deprived of this means of venting his passions, it having become the prerogative of the community. Cf. the passage quoted from the Marquis de Sade, *supra*, p. 213.

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in the militia of the condottieri 'many of their men at arms, being a mixture of peasants, people in low life, and subjects of different potentates . . . they were generally persons that had neither natural nor acquired parts to enable them to act gallantly', the French forces appeared in the form of a *national* army.

'The men at arms were almost all subjects of France, and not of the mean sort, but gentlemen and noblemen.' The officers 'lay under no temptation to go into another service either to gratify ambition or avarice.'

It was seen that there must now be great slaughter, and indeed at the Battle of Rapallo, which practically opened the campaign,

'there were killed, in fighting and in the pursuit, above a hundred men; doubtless a great slaughter, if we consider the manner of fighting in Italy in those days.'

And this was no more than a beginning! Burckhardt says that the devastation wrought by the French seemed trifling in comparison with what was done a little later by the Spaniards, 'in whom perhaps a strain of non-western blood, or perhaps familiarity with the sights provided by the Inquisition, let loose diabolical instincts'. Artillery and the massacre of civilians! Modern warfare had come into being. Little by little this warfare was going to transform the inspired and magnificent knights into troops disciplined and uniform. The transformation had resulted in our own day in abolishing every vestige of the passion for making war, as gradually men serving machines have themselves become machines who feel neither anger nor pity while performing a few automatic movements intended to deal death at a distance.

## CLASSIC WARFARE

### VI

## CLASSIC WARFARE

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the main effort of the men of war was directed to controlling the mechanical monster in order that as many as possible of the humane features of warfare might be preserved. It was not possible to give up technical inventions—artillery and fortifications.\* But at least the *rules* of tactics and strategy could be so multiplied as to allow the intellect and the 'valour' of the commanders to retain a semblance of supremacy among the factors entering into the struggle. Chivalry stood for an attempt to endow instinct with a kind of correct deportment. Warfare in the classical age of Western Europe was conducted with great formality because there was a wish to preserve and renew this correct deportment notwithstanding the advent of inhuman factors. Following the desolation left by the Thirty Years' War, there was a desire to keep expenditure within bounds—men cost dear!—and to avoid alarming a population so thoroughly as to render recruitment impossible.

Vauban turned siege into a kind of mental operation carried out in stages, and these stages, it has been well said, were rather like the five acts of a French classical tragedy.

'It is at this period that war did indeed become the equivalent of a game of chess. When, following a series of complex manœuvres, one of the two adversaries had lost or won several pawns—towns or fortresses—there came the great battle. Standing on some hilltop, from which he could survey the whole field, the entire chessboard, a marshal skilfully caused his splendid regiments to advance or retreat. Check and mate, the loser put his pawns away: the regiments marched off to winter quarters, and every-

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body went about his business pending the next game or campaign.'<sup>1</sup>

It may be inferred that every time war has recovered the aspect of a *game*, this was because society wished to re-introduce the passion myth into its culture—that is to say, wished to make a lawless force submit to a framework and adopt a ritual form of manifesting itself. This is what actually happened in the seventeenth century, as may be seen from the sections on *L'Astrée* and on French classical tragedy in Book IV, *supra*.

'Here matter was being made mental, so as to determine the behaviour of the fighters, who, after all, are living and thinking beings.' So wrote Foch about war in the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup> It is a curious remark, but it is based on a passage in Von der Goltz, which is worth quoting.

'The mistake made by generals who can only follow rules is that they look upon the aim of war as being to carry out neatly organized manœuvres and not to wipe out the forces of the enemy. The military world has invariably fallen into this mistake whenever it has neglected the natural trend of things and the influence of the heart on human resolution and has abandoned the plain and simple notion underlying the laws of war—*that matter must be made mental*.'

The statement is typical of the attitude of mind that made its appearance with the French Revolution—at a time, that is to say, when collective *instincts* and catastrophic *passions* were being let loose. The two modern strategists I have quoted do in fact blame the generals of Louis the Fourteenth and Louis the Fifteenth, of Queen Anne and Frederick the Great, for having sought to carry on war at the price of

<sup>1</sup> J. Boulenger, *Le Grand siècle* (Paris, 1915).

<sup>2</sup> Ferdinand Foch, *Les Principes de la guerre* (Paris, 1929). This is a new edition. The first appeared in 1903, and has been translated by Hilaire Belloc under the title, *The Principles of War* (London, 1918).

## FIGHTING IN LACE CUFFS

getting as few men killed as possible. Yet this was the supreme achievement of a civilization whose whole aim centred upon the regulation and ordering of Nature, matter, and the determinism of both, according to the laws of human reason and of personal benefit. It may have been an illusory aim, but without it no civilization and no culture are possible. Racine, too, as I have recalled, was at one time of the opinion that it is possible to construct a tragedy without using crime as the chief ingredient.

The classical age may be summed up in its refusal to admit that there can be any nobility about disaster. It recognized, not only that war and passion were inevitable evils, but also that they were desired. Nevertheless, it placed the greatness of man in his ability to limit their effect and to make them serve other ends; I may even say—in his ability to subordinate them to the civilian art of diplomacy. Louis the Fourteenth was wont to engage in war over legal and personal questions unconnected with national honour. The War of the Spanish Succession was a quarrel between a husband and his father-in-law over the payment of a stipulated dowry. And in this same age marriage was negotiated according to similar considerations—reciprocal advantages, suitable social rank, landed estates or financial substance. Passion no longer played any part in it whatsoever.

As far as that goes, love itself was about to become a matter of tactics, and in the course of the transformation to lose its dramatic halo.

## VII

## FIGHTING IN LACE CUFFS

The eighteenth century affords the best illustration of the resemblance between love and war, as a few indications are enough to show. Don Juan succeeded to Tristan; perverse



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sensuality to fatal passion. And at the same time war was 'profaned': in place of Judgements of God and in place of sacred chivalry, ascetic, bloody, and barded with iron, there arose a crafty diplomacy and an army commanded by courtiers in lace cuffs, who, since they were libertines, did not intend to imperil the refinements of life.

The epic legends, and likewise the romances of the Round Table, abound in accounts of incredible slaughter. A knight depended for his fame on the number of enemies he had transfixed, the number of heads he had cut off. If possible, he had to cleave a man in two at a single stroke of his sword. The ferocious exaggerations in these tales show plainly enough what actually excited the passion of men and women in the Middle Ages. Glory be to blood! But in the eighteenth century it was considered a famous feat to have reduced an invested town at the price of only three dead on both sides. A skilled art was in honour. Marshal de Saxe wrote: 'I do not favour battles, particularly at the beginning of a war. I am sure a good general can make war *all his life* and not be compelled to fight one.' If, after all, there had to be hand-to-hand fighting, it was not in anything less than a pitched battle or a proper siege; and the tradition of chivalry in its wildest and most lofty aspect recovered a last moment of prestige. Behold the great Condé in his plumed hat prancing up and down among the enemy's troops, like the true hero of *L'Astrée* that he was! And at Fontenoy, when the head of the English column was fifty paces from the French line, the officers on either side saluted, and Lord Hay, a captain of the Guards, called out: 'Tell your men to fire!' But, 'No, sir, you shall have the honour', replied the Comte d'Auteroche. The first volley mowed down the French. What supreme civility in the face of death!

But it was John Law, the Scot who was commissioner-general of finance in France during the minority of Louis the Fifteenth, who achieved the complete 'profanation' of

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war and of its sacred passion. He was in favour of reverting to the methods of the condottieri, although no doubt unaware that these had forestalled him.

‘Victory [he wrote]<sup>1</sup> always falls to the side having the last crown. France keeps up an army costing 100 millions a year, which means two milliards every twenty years. We are not at war for more than five out of these twenty years, and this war, moreover, puts us back at least one milliard. It thus costs us three milliards in order to make war for five years. Lasting success being uncertain, what is the consequence? That with plenty of luck, we may expect to destroy 150,000 of the enemy by fire, sword, flood, famine, fatigue, and disease. Thus the destruction, either directly or indirectly, of one German soldier costs us 20,000 livres, to say nothing of the losses suffered by our own population, losses which are only repaired at the end of twenty-five years. Instead of all this costly, clumsy, and dangerous paraphernalia, would it not be much better to save money by buying up the enemy’s army whenever occasion arose? An Englishman has reckoned that a man is worth £480. That is a topmost figure, and they are not all so dear, as everybody knows; but at least we should save half our cash and the whole of our population, for in return for our money we should get an extra man, whereas under the present system we lose the man we had without being able to employ the other whom we destroy at such cost.’

The Goncourt Brothers have admirably discerned the fundamental identity of what occurred in love and war during the eighteenth century. This is how they describe the ‘tactics’ of the *roués* of the period:

‘It is this warfare and this game of love that perhaps disclose the most profound characteristics of the century, its most hidden devices, and—quite unexpected in the French temperament—something like a genius for duplicity. What nameless great diplomatists and great politi-

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres* (Paris, 1934).

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cians, more ingenious than Cardinal Dubois, more insinuating than Cardinal Bernis, were numbered among the little group of men who made the seduction of a woman the centre of their thoughts and the main business of their lives! . . . What schemings worthy of a novelist or strategist did they not engage in! Not one of them ever undertook a woman without having first made what is called a *plan*, without having given the night to walking up and down and studying the stronghold. . . . And the attack once launched, they remained to the end the same astounding actors, very like the books of the period, in which no single emotion is not given as either feigned or dissimulated. "Neglect nothing" was the motto of one of them.<sup>1</sup>

The motto would have been appropriate to a general, but it was one unfortunately which leaders like Soubise<sup>2</sup> never forgot except on the battlefield.

## VIII

### REVOLUTIONARY WAR

Between Rousseau and German Romanticism—that is to say, between the first reawakening of the myth and the fullness of its tempestuous maturity—there occurred the French Revolution and the campaigns of Bonaparte. Into war there returned catastrophic passion.

<sup>1</sup> E. and J. de Goncourt, *Les Femmes au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1864).

<sup>2</sup> Frederick the Great defeated Soubise at Rossbach in Saxony in 1757. This gave rise to a popular song in Paris, the first verse being:

Soubise dit, la lanterne à la main,  
J'ai beau chercher; où diable est mon armée?  
Elle était pourtant là, hier matin,  
Me l'a-t-on prise, ou l'aurais-je égarée?

—Translator.

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From a strictly military standpoint, what novelty was contributed by the Revolution? 'An outburst of passion never before equalled', is the answer given by Foch. According to him, the heresy of the old school had been to seek to make war into an *exact science* when it is really a *terrible and passionate drama*. Everybody knows, of course, that an explosion of sentimentality preceded and accompanied the Revolution, an event passionate far more than—in the strict sense of the word—political. With the murder of the king—a deed which in a primitive society would have had a sacred and ritualistic significance—the violence that had long been pinned down by the classical formality of warfare became once again something at once horrifying and alluring. It was the cult and blood-spilling mystery that gave rise to a new form of community—the Nation. *And a Nation requires that passion shall be translated to the level of the people as a whole.* Actually, it is easier to feel that this happened than to give an account of it. Every passion, it may be objected, presupposes the existence of *two* beings, and it is therefore difficult to see, if passion was taken over by a Nation, to whom the Nation then addressed itself. Let us remember, however, that the passion of love is at bottom narcissism, the lover's self-magnification, far more than it is a relation with the beloved. Tristan wanted the branding of love more than he wanted the possession of Iscult. For he believed that the intense and devouring flame of passion would make him divine; and, as Wagner understood, the equal of the world.

Eyes with joy are blinded . . .  
I myself am the world.

Passion requires that the *self* shall become greater than all things, as solitary and powerful as God. Without knowing it, passion also requires that beyond its apotheosis death shall indeed be the end of all things.

And nationalist ardour, too is a self-elevation, a narcis-

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sistic love on the part of the collective Self. No doubt, its relation with others is seldom averred to be love; nearly always hate is what first appears, and what is proclaimed. But hate of the other is likewise always present in the transports of passionate love. There has thus occurred no more than a shift of emphasis. And what does national passion require? The elevation of collective might can only lead to the following dilemma: either the triumph of imperialism—of the ambition to become the equal of the whole world—or the people next door strongly object, and there ensues war. Now it is to be noticed that a nation undergoing the early surges of its passion seldom recoils from war, even if that war must be hopeless. A nation thus unconsciously expresses a readiness to court the risk of death, and even to meet death, rather than surrender its passion. 'Liberty or death', the Jacobins yelled, at a time when the forces of the enemy seemed to be twenty times as strong as their own, and when therefore 'liberty' and 'death' were words very near to having one and the same meaning.

Thus Nation and War are connected as Love and Death are connected. And from this point onwards nationalism has been the predominant factor in war. 'Whoever writes upon strategy and tactics should confine himself to expounding a *national* strategy and tactics, for these alone can be of use to the nation for whom he writes.' Thus General von der Goltz, a follower of Clausewitz. And Clausewitz constantly asserted that the Prussian theory of war must be based on the experience gained in the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic campaigns. The Battle of Valmy was a victory of passion over 'exact science'. It was to the cry of 'Long live the Nation!' that the Sansculottes repulsed an allied army still bent on conducting operations on 'classic' lines. It will be recalled that Goethe, after witnessing the battle, said: 'On this field and on this day a new era begins in the history of the world.' To this famous pronouncement Foch adds:

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‘Truly enough a new era had begun, the era of national wars that are fought *under no restraints whatever*, because a nation throws all its resources into the struggle, because the aim of these wars is not to safeguard some dynastic claim, but to defeat or propagate philosophical ideas and intangible advantages, because these wars are staked upon feelings and passions, elemental forces never enlisted before.’

There is a certain parallel between the love affairs of Bonaparte and Napoleon and his campaigns in Italy and Austria. One kind of battle corresponds to his conquest of Joséphine—a bold stroke delivered by the weaker adversary, who hurls the whole of his forces against one decisive spot, and bluffs. Another kind of battle corresponds to his dynastic marriage with the Archduchess Marie Louise—and this was a big affair destined to find a place in the textbooks: Wagram, for example, where military science, having assumed rhetorical proportions, was combined with an overwhelming and violent element of surprise. Possibly the defeat at Waterloo was due to an excessive parade of military science, possibly to the fact that by then national-revolutionary dash was exhausted. Certainly, at any rate, Napoleon was the first to take the passion factor into account each time he gave battle. That is why a general whom he had just defeated in Italy was heard to exclaim: ‘It is incredible how this fellow Bonaparte ignores the most elementary rules of war!’

## IX

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Beginning with the French Revolution, ‘the hearts of the soldiery’ became part of the armoury of battle, and, as

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Foch puts it, war grew 'fierce and tragic'. This does not mean that it thereupon became possible for any individual soldier to decide a war, provided he was sufficiently heroic; only that the collective emotions came into play—what one may dare call, the passionate might of the Nation. The romantic poets had a notable share in the wars of emancipation which Prussia fought against Napoleon. And the essentially passionate philosophies of thinkers like Fichte and Hegel were the earliest reinforcements of German nationalism. That is why the wars of the nineteenth century became more and more bloody. It was no longer rival interests that came into conflict, but antagonistic 'religions'. And, unlike interests, religions do not compromise; instead they exact a heroic death. At all times religious wars have been by far the most violent.

And yet, although this is true as regards the first three-quarters of the century, and above all of the period from 1848 to 1870, following the latter date national passions were provisionally appeased, and for forty years they gave place to capitalistic and commercial enterprise. Violence was still resorted to in the name of the Nation, but material advantages were undoubtedly what ruled. Foch insists on this very well in his *Principes de la guerre*.

'War [he says] became national in the first instance for the sake of winning and securing the independence of peoples—that of the French in 1792–93, of the Spaniards in 1804–14, of the Russians in 1812, of the Germans in 1813, and of Europe in 1814. At this stage it produced those glorious and powerful displays of popular passion known as Valmy, Saragossa, Tarancon, Moscow, and Leipzig.

'War then went on being national for the sake of winning *unity of races* or *nationality*. This is what the Italians and the Prussians claimed to be fighting for in 1866 and 1870. In its name also the king of Prussia, after he had become German emperor, put forward a title to the German provinces of Austria.

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‘But if war is still national to-day [1903], it is for the sake of securing economic benefits and profitable trade agreements. .

‘After having been the violent means whereby peoples wrested a place in the world for themselves which made them into nations, war has become the means to which they still resort in order to enrich themselves.’

‘Trade follows the flag.’ The colonial era was the last period of ‘peace’ that Europe can be said to have deserved. I have already pointed out<sup>1</sup> that in manners and in literature this era was characterized by a final attempt to mythologize passion. The reaction does not bear comparison with chivalry (although its social purpose was the same), because it was adapted to the present scale of society. What now inspired convention and the formality of our behaviour was no longer any spiritual principle, but calculations of private advantage, which cannot supply the community with a strong armature. The very Nation being invoked had lost its romantic prestige: the flag protected the interests of the State, not the passions or honour of the best elements in the body social. And the office of the State was now no more than the honorific one of a board of directors; it made war in behalf of banks, as in the case of the conquest of Madagascar. In short, colonial warfare was but an extension of capitalistic competition in a form that laid a heavier burden on the country at large though not on the great business firms.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century love<sup>2</sup> among

<sup>1</sup> Book IV, §18, *supra*.

<sup>2</sup> I mean that abstract and striking thing, unreal but significant, the *average of typical expressions* of love in a given period—as unreal and as significant whether ugly or beautiful, whether at the end of the nineteenth century or during the famous century of Louis the Fourteenth, whether vicious or virtuous. There are signs which are not a particular period itself—every period contains some of everything—but which belong to one period rather than to another. That is all I mean.



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the middle classes had become a most curious medley of nervous sentimentality and of regard for dividends and dowries, as it still is to-day in matrimonial advertisements. Pure sex, if it happened to intrude, could only cloud these petty schemings and mass-produced 'noble sentiments', in the same way as a drop of water clouds absinthe. War likewise had become a compound into which entered, on the one hand, the working up of popular opinion—what was the *Revanche* for 1870–1 but a piece of national sentimentality?—on the other hand, the ambitions of business-men and financiers. The true warlike element had to provide for itself surreptitiously. War was growing middle-class. The blood was getting commercialized. Army men already seemed anomalous to the realists, and to women and idle gapers a kind of thrilling survival.<sup>1</sup> Yet it was being generally supposed that the tremendous potential of frenzy and slaughter which had been piled up in Europe as a result of the cultivation of passion for centuries could be disposed of without incurring havoc. The war of 1914 was a most impressive consequence of this disregard for the myth.

## X

### TOTAL WAR

With Verdun, which the Germans called the *Materialschlacht* or Battle of War Material, it must seem that the resemblance instituted by chivalry between the *modes* of love and war came to an end. No doubt it had always been the concrete aim of war to overcome the enemy's resistance by destroying his armed might.<sup>2</sup> But the nation it

<sup>1</sup> The attitude was that of democracies when they grow excited over royal weddings.

<sup>2</sup> To force a woman's resistance by seducing her is peace; to do so by violating her is war.

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was sought to defeat was not thereby destroyed: all that collapsed were its defences. Victory was determined by pitched battles against a professional army, the investing of fortresses, the capture of a commander—in short, by a system of exact rules the application of which was in consequence an art. And the victor triumphed over what was *alive*, a country or a people, either of which could be an object of desire. The whole face of war was thus changed with the introduction of the material and inhuman methods employed at Verdun.

For as soon as war, from having been merely military, becomes a 'total war', the destruction of armed resistance means the wiping out of the whole live might of the enemy—the workmen incorporated in factories, the mothers who are begetting future soldiers; in short, the whole of the 'means of production', things and persons lumped together. War is no longer the rape, but the murder, of the hostile and coveted object of desire. Verdun, moreover, was but the preamble of this new kind of war; for there the process was confined to the methodical destruction of a million *soldiers*, and no civilians. But it was a *Kriegspiel* that allowed the final touches to be put to an instrument which is now able to operate on a far wider scale—against areas such as London, Paris, or Berlin; that is to say, not against cannon-fodder, but against the flesh and blood manufacturing the cannon—an instrument of obviously much more far-reaching effect.

The technique of dealing death from afar has no equivalent in any imaginable code of love. Total war eludes both man and instinct; it turns upon passion, its begetter. And it is this, not the scale of the massacres, that is new in the history of the world.

This suggests three remarks.

War arose *in the country*, and in connexion with fighting it has been customary down to the present time to speak of *campaigns* and of *fields*. But since 1914 we have been wit-

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nessing the *urbanization* of war. The last European war provided a large portion of the peasant masses of Europe with their introduction to mechanical civilization. It was a kind of conducted tour of a World Exhibition of death-dealing arts and industries, with daily demonstrations upon live subjects. It can also be likened to the first *Four Years Plan*—a notion taken up a little later by the dictators, for ends apparently opposite but actually very similar.

The effect of this general enlistment of the mechanized means of destruction has been to *neutralize the actual passion for war* in the hearts of fighting men. The assuaging of violence in bloodshed gives place to mass brutality, and rival hordes are hurled at one another, not by the impulse of passionate frenzy, but in obedience to the calculating brains of engineers. Henceforth, man is no more than the servant of matter; he has himself become a material, and one that is more effective the less human it is in its individual reflexes. In this way, notwithstanding the drug-effect of propaganda, victory now depends ultimately on the laws of mechanics rather than on the forecasts of psychology. The fighting instinct has been thwarted. The explosion of sex which has usually accompanied huge armed struggles can now only occur among civilians at the rear. In the last war, despite efforts in official quarters and on the part of certain popular writers and photographers to spread a high-flown sentimentality, a soldier's coming on leave was simply the onrush of a male obsessed by an enforced continence that had lasted too long. Countless doctors and soldiers have testified to the way in which the war of material was accompanied by a 'sex disaster'.<sup>1</sup> A widespread impotence—or at least its premonitory symptoms, chronic onanism and homosexuality—was the result vouched for by statistics of a sojourn of four years in the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Sittengeschichte des Weltkriegs* (2 vols., Vienna and Leipzig, 1930), the results of an inquiry by the late Magnus Hirschfeld and twelve other German doctors.

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trenches. That is how it came about that presently for the first time there was a general revolt of *soldiers* against war,<sup>1</sup> because war, from being an outlet for the passions, had become a kind of vast castration of Europe.

Total war thus implies the discarding of *every accepted mode* of fighting. Beginning with 1920, all the 'diplomatic fuss' of ultimatums and 'declarations' of war ceased to have currency. Hostilities were no longer brought solemnly to a close by the signing of treaties. The arbitrary distinctions between open and fortified towns, civilians and soldiers, authorized and unauthorized means of destruction, all disappeared. It follows that now the defeat of a country can no longer be symbolical or metaphorical—that is, be confined to certain agreed *signs*—but has actually to be its death. Here again we see that once the notion of rules is discarded, war can no longer be an act of rape between nations; it must be a sadistic crime, the possession of a dead victim, and hence in fact a *non-possession*. It no longer exhibits a normal sexual instinct, or even the passion that employs and transcends this instinct, but only that—as we have seen—irresistible perversion of passion, the 'castration complex'.

## XI

### THE TRANSPLANTING OF PASSION INTO POLITICS

Games require to be played on an enclosed ground. When the field of war, from being such a ground—the lists deco-

<sup>1</sup> The modern lanzknecht, realizing that this total war is the negation of the passion for war, embarked upon absurd adventures, which he sought precisely because they were absurd and inhuman. Cf. notably the novels of Ernst von Jünger (*A Chronicle from the Trench Warfare of 1918* (London, 1930), &c.) and of Ernst von Salomon.

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rated with symbols—became a bombardment sector, passion was ousted from it. And passion thereupon sought and found other means of expression. Moreover, it was driven to do so by as much as anything the weakening of private and mental powers of resistance and by the altered nature of war. On the one hand, manners in democratic countries have grown so flexible as not to tend any longer to set up absolute *obstructions* such as intensify passion. On the other hand, the system of breaking in the young adopted in totalitarian countries tends to banish from private life every kind of internal tragic experience and ambiguous emotion. Lawlessness in manners and authoritarian hygienics have operated to roughly the same effect. Both thwart the human need of passion, whether the need is hereditary or acquired through culture; they cause its intimate and personal impulsions to become feeble.

Love, in what till recently was called the post-war period, became a curious medley of anxious intellectualism—a number of novels then depicted dread and the middle-class defiance of restrictions—and of materialism—what Germans called the *neue Sachlichkeit*. It was clearly recognized that romantic passion could no longer obtain the ingredients necessary to sustaining its myth, could no longer pick out powers of resistance in the midst of an atmosphere charged with tempestuous and secret devotion. A pathological fear of falling in love in a simple, straightforward manner and of suffering ‘deceptions of the heart’ together with a feverish hankering after ‘experiences’ formed the ‘climate’ of the chief novels in vogue. The unambiguous significance of this was that *the individual relations of the sexes had ceased to be the most appropriate theatre for passion to occur in*. Passion, it seemed, was being detached from its concomitant. We entered upon a period of wandering *libidos* in quest of new spheres of activity. The first scene to offer itself was that of politics.

The mass-politics practised since 1917 have been simply

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an extension of total war by other means, if I may be allowed to convert Clausewitz's definition of war as 'diplomacy carried on by other means'. The political use made of the term 'front' at once shows this. Moreover, a Totalitarian State is but the state of war being prolonged and renewed, and then made permanent, in a nation. But if total war abolishes as much as any possibility of passion, politics transfers individual passions to the level of the Collective Being. Everything that a totalitarian education withholds from individuals is heaped upon the personified Nation. It is the Nation (or the Party) that has passions. It is the Nation (or the Party) that takes over the whole interplay of exciting obstructions, *askesis*, and the rush made unwittingly towards a heroic and therefore divinizing death. Whereas within and at the bottom personal problems are now sterilized, externally and on top the passionate potential is being intensified daily. Eugenics have taken control of the morality that concerns the citizens of a State, and eugenics are a rational negation of any kind of private 'experience'. Yet this only serves to increase the tension of the whole, personified in the Nation. The Nation-State says to the Germans: 'Beget children!'—and that is a negation of passion. But it also says to its neighbours: 'There are too many of us within our frontiers. I must therefore have more territory!'—and this is a new passion. Hence all the tensions abolished at the bottom are heaped on the top. Unmistakably, when rival wills to power confront one another—and there are already *several* Totalitarian States!—they are bound to clash passionately. Each becomes for some other an *obstruction*. The real, tacit, and inevitable aim of the totalitarian elevation is therefore war, and war means *death*. Furthermore, as happened with passionate love, not only is this aim vigorously denied by those concerned, but also it actually is unconscious. Nobody dares to say, 'I want war', any more than in passionate love the lovers said: 'We want death.' Nevertheless, every-

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thing that is being done hastens the attainment of this aim. And everything that is being excited can only find its true significance in war.

There is abundant evidence of this novel resemblance between politics and passion. The restraints which the State imposes in the name of the nation's greatness result in a collective *askesis*. The umbrageous susceptibility of Totalitarian Nations is the equivalent of a knight's honour. And, moreover, let me stress one striking feature. The masses respond to the dictator in a particular country *in the same way* as the women of that country respond to the tactics of suitors. Hitler's success with the German masses may seem surprising, but a non-German would be quite as much astonished by the kind of behaviour that pleases German women. The Latins woo a woman by turning her head with flattering talk, and it is likewise with a flood of flattering talk that French politicians woo their voters. Hitler is more rough and ready. He expresses anger and grievances in the same breath. He does not persuade; he casts a spell. Conjuring up destiny, he asserts that this destiny is himself. He thus releases the masses from responsibility for their conduct, and hence he rids them of any oppressive sense of moral guilt. The crowd surrenders to the dread saviour, and hails him as its liberator in the very moment he paralyses and possesses it. We should note that the popular term in Germany for getting married is *freien*, a verb which means literally 'to free'. Hitler is presumably only too well aware of this.

'There is [he writes]<sup>1</sup> something so thoroughly feminine about the attitude and reactions of the great majority of the common people that its opinions and conduct are the result of feeling far more than of pure cogitation. The masses are not very susceptible to abstract ideas. On the other hand, they are easily gripped by an appeal to emotion. . . . In all ages the force that has launched the most violent revolutions

<sup>1</sup> *Mein Kampf*.

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has not been the announcement of some scientific idea which seized the crowd, but a fanaticism that stimulated it and an actual hysteria which infected it with wild enthusiasm.'

Yes, this has been so 'in all ages'. But the novelty to-day is that this passionate influence over the masses described by Hitler is accompanied by a rationalizing influence over individuals. Furthermore, this influence is not obtained by some agitator, but by the Leader who incarnates the Nation. That is why the transference of passion from private to public life has resulted in an unprecedented concentration of power. It will need a superhuman Wagner to orchestrate the stupendous catastrophe of passion become totalitarian.

This brings us to the verge of a conclusion that I was far from foreseeing when I began this book. The gradual transformation which the European myth of passion has undergone proves to have followed the same course in the history of the methods of warfare and in the history of literature. And in both cases the transformation has culminated in an aspect of the present crisis which receives too little notice—I mean, the dissolution of the *formal modes* instituted by chivalry. In literature 'throwbacks' occur, but in the realm of war every change is irreversible; and it is in this realm that the need of providing a fresh solution first became evident. The solution adopted goes by the name of the Totalitarian State. It is the answer given by the twentieth century—a century born of war—to the permanent threat which passion and the death instinct hold over every human society. The answer of the twelfth century was courtly chivalry, with its romantic morality and myths. The answer of the seventeenth century is symbolized in French classical tragedy.<sup>1</sup> The answer of the eighteenth

<sup>1</sup> Bachofen, the author of *Mutterrecht*, advances an analogous theory regarding Greek tragedy considered as an *Auseinandersetzung*—discussion, quarrel, or explanation—carried on between the community and the forces within the myth.



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was Don Juan's cynicism and rationalist irony. But Romanticism was no answer, unless—and this is possible—its eloquent surrender to the nocturnal forces of the myth is regarded as an ultimate attempt to enfeeble the myth by deliberate excess. However that may be, the defence was hardly proportionate to the peril simultaneously let loose. The anti-vital forces long dammed up by the myth then overflowed into the most various spheres, so that there followed a dissociation—using the word in the exact sense of a 'severance of the bonds that hold society together'. The war of 1914–18 was a judgement upon the world that had imagined it could dispense with *formal modes* and leave the fatal 'content' of the myth entirely untrammelled.

And yet I cannot feel that to allow all passion to be absorbed by the Nation will prove more than an emergency measure. The menace may be held off for the time being, but it is also being made to weigh permanently upon the very lives of those peoples who have thus been formed into solid masses. No doubt the Totalitarian State is a newly devised *formal mode*, but one too vast, too rigid, and too geometrical for the complex lives of human beings, however militarized, to be successfully shaped and organized within its framework. Police measures do not constitute a culture, nor slogans a morality. Between the artificial framework of great States and the everyday life of men and women, the gap is too wide, so that restlessness and uncertainty are greater than ever. Nothing is *really* settled.

It is possible that the new war which began in September 1939 will wipe out the problem of passion together with the civilization that brought this problem into existence. But it seems to me more likely that the problem will arise again in totalitarian countries even as it has never ceased to exercise us who belong to liberal societies. In the two concluding books of this work, accordingly, I treat the problem as still active. The first of them deals with a con-

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.flict in our manners between the myth and the institution of marriage; the second sums up an attitude which I put forward less as a final answer than as what I personally have chosen.



*Book Six*

*The Myth v. Marriage*



# I

## THE BREAKDOWN OF MARRIAGE

The Middle Ages had two rival moral systems—one upheld by Christianized society; the other the product of heretical courtesy. The first took marriage for granted, and even made it into a sacrament; the second promoted a set of values in the light of which—at any rate theoretically—marriage was a mistake. The attitude of each to adultery clearly indicates their mutual antagonism.

In the eyes of the Church, adultery was at one and the same time a sacrilege, a crime against the natural order, and a crime against the social order. For the sacrament conjoined in one and the same act two faithful souls, two bodies capable of begetting, and two juridical persons. It was therefore a sacrament that made holy the fundamental needs of both the species and the community. Whoever broke the triple undertaking given at the altar did not thereby become 'interesting', but an object of pity or contempt. The Roman Catholic synthesis was intended to harmonize fire and water, as alike in Scripture and in the Fathers it was possible to find thoroughly contradictory theories regarding the holiness of procreation—the law of the species—and regarding the holiness of virginity—the law of the spirit. The Old Testament, for example, deems a numerous progeny the sign of election, whereas Saint Paul says that it is good for a man not to touch a woman, even if he also says that it is better to marry than to burn.

The heresy which I am connecting with *cortezia* in the South of France condemned Catholic marriage on each of the three heads just mentioned. It denied that marriage was a *sacrament*, declaring its sacramental character to be estab-

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lished by no single unambiguous text in the Gospel.<sup>1</sup> It declared procreation to be the work of the Prince of Darkness, the Demiurge who, in its view, had created the visible world. It sought to destroy a social order which could countenance and demand war as a manifestation of the collective will to live.<sup>2</sup> But the mainspring of its triple rejection of marriage was in reality a doctrine according to which Love is the divinizing Eros, everlastingly in anxious conflict with the fleshly creature and this creature's enslaving instincts.

Accordingly, the appearance of a literature extolling the *passion* of Love could not do otherwise than transform completely the attitude to adultery. Doubtless, unalloyed Catharist doctrine never condoned the fault *per se*; on the contrary, it prescribed chastity. But, as I have pointed out earlier, inextricable misunderstandings were produced by the courtly symbol of love for a (spiritual) Lady, which obviously made love incompatible with marriage in the flesh. To an uninitiated reader of Provençal poems and Arthurian romances, Tristan was no doubt guilty of a fault in committing adultery, but at the same time the fault took on the aspect of a *splendid experience in contrast to obedience of the moral law*. What for Manichaeans was a dramatic expression of the struggle between faith and the world thereupon became for such a reader an ambiguous and sear-

<sup>1</sup> According to Father B. M. Lavaud, the Roman Catholic sacrament is open to being justified by the account of the miracle at Cana ('a mere hypothesis', he says, however), by the passage in which Jesus states that what God has joined man must not put asunder, or, finally, by the conversations between the risen Jesus and his disciples regarding the Kingdom of God, 'which the Evangelists and the Acts mention, but do not describe in detail'. Father Lavaud points to nothing more substantial than these three 'hypotheses' as ground for attributing to the traditional dogma a *Biblical* authority. Vide his article in *Etudes carmélitaines*, April 1938, p. 186.

<sup>2</sup> The Gnostics often asserted that 'crimes are a tribute paid to life'. Cf. Schultz, *Dokumente der Gnosis*, op. cit.

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ing 'poesy'. And this poesy was seemingly altogether secular. Its seductive power was intensified by the reader's own ignorance of the mystical significance of its symbols, for he supposed these to point merely to some *vague* and *pleasing* riddle. '

Only thus can we account for the fact that in the twelfth century an adulterer or adulteress suddenly became somebody 'interesting'. King David, in lying with Bath-Sheba, was held to have committed a crime and to have made himself into an object of contempt. But when Tristan carries off Iseult, his deed turns into romance, and he makes himself into an object of admiration. What had hitherto been a 'fault' and what could only give rise to edifying remarks on the perils of sin and on remorse now became—in symbol—something mystically virtuous, and later on was degraded (in literature) into a disturbing and alluring entanglement.

I do not want to suggest that the present breakdown of marriage is simply the latest aspect of the discord between a medieval heresy and orthodoxy. The heresy, as such, exists no longer; and if orthodoxy does still exist, it must nevertheless be admitted to play but a minor part in modern social life. In my opinion, the present general demoralization—and not amorality, as it is too often mis-called—reflects a confused strife in our lives as a result of the co-existence of two moral systems, one inherited from religious orthodoxy, but no longer sustained by a living faith; the other derived from a heresy of which the 'in-essence-lyrical' expression has come down to us in a form altogether profaned and therefore distorted. On the one hand, we have to-day a morality concerned for the species and the general well-being of society, though none the less bearing some impress of religion—what are called middle-class morals. On the other hand, there is a morality spread among us through our literary and artistic atmosphere and general culture—and this produces passionate or romantic morals. The whole of middle-class youth in Europe is



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brought up to regard marriage with respect; and yet at the same time all young people breathe in from books and periodicals, from stage and screen, and from a thousand daily allusions, a romantic atmosphere in the haze of which passion seems to be the supreme test that one day or other awaits every true man or woman, and it is accepted that nobody has really lived till he or she 'has been through it'. Now, passion and marriage are essentially irreconcilable. Their origins and their ends make them mutually exclusive. Their co-existence in our midst constantly raises insoluble problems, and the strife thereby engendered constitutes a persistent danger for every one of our social safeguards.

In bygone times it fell to the myth to restrain this latent lawlessness, and to fit it symbolically into moral categories. The myth provided an outlet, and operated to the benefit of civilization. But it came about that the myth was abused and profaned together with the formal modes which had furnished its physical embodiment. If it were now to strive to rise into existence again, we know that no powers of *resistance* would be strong enough to serve as its mask and excuse. Every month sees a flood of articles and books about the breakdown of marriage. They are not in the least likely to settle the problem; for only the myth—that is to say, our unawareness—could bring about in behalf of passion a kind of *modus vivendi*. In making us more keenly alive to the problem, these articles and books contribute, on the contrary, to hampering the elaboration of a settlement. They are themselves evidence of the breakdown, and signs also of our inability to repair it with things as they are. For the institution of marriage was founded on three sets of values which subjected it to *compulsions*, and it was precisely in the effect and interaction of these that the myth achieved expression.<sup>1</sup> But to-day the compulsions have been either relaxed or abandoned.

There were, in the first place, sacred compulsions. Pagan

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Book I, *supra*.

## THE BREAKDOWN OF MARRIAGE

rites have invariably made marriage the subject of a ritual, vestiges of which long survived in our own customs. The ritual covered the purchase, abduction, and exorcism of the bride. Nowadays, owing to economic uncertainties, dowries (even on the Continent) have lost importance. The customs derived from nuptial abduction now only live on as rustic practical jokes. In France no longer does a mother call on the parents of the girl whom her son wishes to marry and formally ask for her hand. Nowhere now is a betrothal very often the occasion for a lawyer's presence at a full-dress reception. And few couples feel any superstitious need of having their union 'blessed' by a priest.

There were, in the second place, social compulsions. But to-day considerations of rank, blood, family interests, and even money, are receding into the background so far as democratic countries are concerned, and hence the mutual choice of a marriage partner tends more and more to depend on individual circumstances. That is why divorce is steadily on the increase. Likewise epithalamial ceremonies have either been greatly simplified or else are dispensed with altogether. Customs of remote and sacred origin such as that of 'the semi-publicity of the nuptial bed'<sup>1</sup> were kept up in the French provinces right into the seventeenth century. The original mystery had been forgotten, but the ritual continued to give marrying its social character and to fit it into the life of the community. But in the eighteenth century the ceremony of 'bedding the bride' had already become nothing more than an occasion for mild and picturesque gallantries. Nowadays the honeymoon, to the extent that it survives and retains any significance, must be held to indicate a wish for escape from habitual social surroundings and an insistence on the private nature of what is called wedded bliss.

There were, finally, religious compulsions. But the modern mind, in so far as it is still able to distinguish

<sup>1</sup> *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, op. cit.

## THE MYTH *v.* MARRIAGE

between Christianity and sacred and social compulsions, recoils from it with horror. For a religious vow is taken for 'time and eternity', which means that it makes no allowance for temperamental vagaries, alterations of character, and changes in taste and external circumstances, such as every couple must expect to experience. And it is on there being no such ups and downs that modern couples make what they call their 'happiness' depend. I shall return to this presently.

From such a general decay of institutional obstructions a slackening of tension was bound to ensue, so that it is no wonder if there is now a vast confusion. Adultery has become a topic either for delicate psychological analysis or else for facetious jokes. Fidelity in marriage has become slightly ridiculous: it is so conventional. Strictly speaking, the two hostile moral systems are no longer in *conflict* (and hence no myth is any longer possible), but are approaching a state of mutual neutralization, which will be reached when the old values—not transcended, but abased—have finally dissolved.

## II

### THE MODERN NOTION OF HAPPINESS

Now that marriage has ceased to enjoy the safeguards of a system of social compulsions, the only possible basis on which it can rest is individual choice. This means, actually, that the success of any given marriage depends upon an individual notion of the nature of happiness, which at best may be assumed to be identical in the minds of both parties. And yet if in any event it is perplexing enough to define happiness in general, definition becomes impossible when account has to be taken of the contemporary wish to control one's own happiness, or—what doubtless amounts to the same thing—to be able to *experience* the ingredients of

## THE MODERN NOTION OF HAPPINESS

one's happiness and to be able to analyse them and roll them over the tongue, so as to give here and there a neat touch of improvement. Your happiness, it is being asserted from the pulpits of magazines, depends on this or on that; and this or that is invariably something that must be *acquired*, usually for cash. The success of this propaganda indicates in what kind of a moral situation Europe and America are to-day; and the consequence is that we are obsessed by the notion of a facile happiness and at the same time are rendered incapable of being happy. For everything thus suggested introduces us to a world of comparisons in which, until there are men like gods, no happiness can be established. Happiness is indeed a Eurydice, vanishing as soon as gazed upon. It can exist only in *acceptance*, and succumbs as soon as it is laid claim to. For it appertains to being, not to having, as the moralists in all ages have insisted; and our own age brings no new factor to disprove them. Every wish to experience happiness, to have it at one's beck and call—instead of *being* in a *state* of happiness as though by grace—must instantly produce an intolerable sense of want.

To wish marriage to be based on such 'happiness' implies in men and women to-day a capacity for boredom which is almost morbid, or else a secret intention not to play fair. Perhaps it is only this intention or hope—nearly always illusory, by the way—that can account for the readiness of couples to get married 'without believing in it'. The dream of potential passion acts as a perpetual distraction to paralyse the revulsions of boredom. People are not unaware that passion is a woe, but they imagine that such a woe will be splendid and 'vital' in a way ordinary life cannot be, and more exciting than the 'happy-go-lucky' present. Either a resigned boredom or else passion—this is the dilemma our lives come up against as a result of the contemporary notion of happiness. In any case this notion threatens the ruin of marriage as a social institution.

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### III

#### ‘IT’S WONDERFUL TO BE IN LOVE!’

IN the twelfth century in Provence love was regarded as a dignity. It not only imparted a titular nobility, but actually ennobled. Troubadours were raised socially to the level of the aristocracy, which treated them as equals. There are numerous instances of villeins being knighted on the score that they sang the praises of Love. That is why some historians have referred to a democratic feudalism in Languedoc. Unquestionably they are guilty of a misunderstanding; for the Love in question was nothing but the Catharist faith, and the rise of a commoner to knighthood was a mystic symbol rather than any breach of feudal law. But because commoners were knighted, it presently happened—as I have recorded at length—that the symbol came to be taken at its face value and that profane love was made ‘mystical’. That is how there has been imposed on us to-day through the medium of literature the altogether modern and romantic notion that passion is something morally noble, and need know no law. Whoever loves passionately is supposed to be thereby made one of an exalted section of mankind among whom social and other barriers cease to exist. The violinist in a café orchestra may carry off a princess; a mechanic marry an heiress.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, a beauty queen has some hopes of becoming the wife of an earl or millionaire. This is a modern ‘adaptation’—to use a cinematographic term, such as is alone appropriate here—of the theory that love is above the established social order.

That profane passion is something absurd, a kind of

<sup>1</sup> Since the advent of National Socialism, German films have freely used the plot in which a workman or chauffeur comes ‘to deserve’ his employer’s daughter.

## ‘IT’S WONDERFUL TO BE IN LOVE!’

drug, a ‘sickness of the soul’, as the Ancients supposed, everybody is ready to grant, and moralists have said so *ad nauseam*; but in this age of novels and films, when all of us are more or less drugged, nobody will *believe* it, and the distinction is capital. Men and women to-day, in being creatures of passion, expect an overwhelming love to produce some revelation either regarding themselves or about life at large. This is a last vestige of the primitive mysticism. From poetry to the piquant anecdote, passion is everywhere treated as an *experience*, something that will alter my life and enrich it with the unexpected, with thrilling chances, and with enjoyment ever more violent and gratifying. Anything whatever thereupon becomes possible, even a future in accordance with my wishes! I shall be plunged into passion; it will bring me elevation and ‘transports’. The reader will say that this is but the everlasting illusion of mankind, the most guileless and—notwithstanding all I have said—the most ‘natural’; for it is the illusion of freedom and of living to the full. But really a man becomes free only when he has attained self-mastery, whereas a creature of passion seeks instead to be mastered, to lose all self-control, to be beside himself and in ecstasy. And indeed he is being urged on by his nostalgia, the origin and end of which are unknown to him. His illusion of freedom springs from this double ignorance. A man of passion wants to discover his ‘type of woman’ and to love no woman of any other type. Gérard de Nerval, in one of his poems, speaks of a dream in which a noble Lady appears to him in a landscape of childhood memories.

She’s fair, dark-eyed, and in old-fashioned clothes  
That in another life I may withal  
Have seen before, and now but do recall.

Without question this is a mother-image, and psychoanalysis has shown what tragic impediments that may imply. But to quote a poet is either of no value or of too

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much. I want to confine myself to the illusion which most people in the present century have been *taught*: what obsesses them far more than a mother-image is 'standardized beauty'. Nowadays—and we are only at the beginning—a man who falls passionately in love with a woman whom he *alone* finds beautiful is supposed to be a prey to nerves. Some years hence such men will get put in nursing homes. Admittedly, every generation forms a standardized notion of beauty as a matter of course, even as fashion concentrates at various times on heads, bosoms, hips, or the slim lines of the open-air girl. But nowadays our sheep-like aesthetic tastes exert an influence never before equalled, and they are being fostered by every possible technical means. Soon they will be fostered by political means as well. A feminine type thus recedes more and more from personal imponderables and is selected in Hollywood. Presently the type will be selected by the State. This influence of standardized beauty is a double one. On the one hand, it preordains who shall be an appropriate object of passion (and to this extent the object is drained of personality); on the other hand, it forbids marriage unless a bride shall resemble the obsessing star of the moment. It is true that a woman can always make up to look like Greta Garbo; but how is a man to turn himself into the double of Clark Gable or Robert Taylor? In short, the present so-called 'freedom' of passion is a question of advertising power. A man who imagines he is yearning for 'his' type, or a woman for 'hers', is having his or her private wishes determined by fashionable and commercial influences which change at least once every six months.

Suppose, as is likely, that a man (I take a man for convenience: 'woman' may also be read each time) at last settles on the nature of his type—a cross between what really appeals to him and what films have taught him to like. He meets a woman of this type, and recognizes her. There she is, the woman of his heart's desire and of his

## 'IT'S WONDERFUL TO BE IN LOVE!'

most intimate nostalgia, the Iseult he has dreamed of!<sup>1</sup> Of course she is already married. But let her get a divorce, and she shall be his! Together they will experience 'real life', and the Tristan he nurses like a hidden daemon within his breast will blossom. As regards the revelation of the myth, that is all that matters. There we have the real 'marriage for love' of our time—with passion as the bride! But thereupon the onlookers (or the public) display a certain uneasiness. Will the lover with all his desires gratified continue to be in love with his Iseult now that she has been *wed*? Is a cherished nostalgia still desirable once it has recovered its object? For Iseult is still a stranger, the very essence of what is strange in woman and of all that is eternally fugitive, vanishing, and almost hostile in a fellow-being, that which indeed incites to pursuit, and rouses in the heart of a man who has fallen a prey to the myth an avidity for possession so much more delightful than possession itself. She is the woman-from-whom-one-is-parted: to possess her is to lose her.

And thereupon begins a new 'passion'. There is a deliberate effort to renew both the obstruction and the struggle. The woman in my arms I must imagine as other than she is. I give her another guise, I cause her to recede in my dreams, I strive to disturb the emotional tie that is gradually being formed thanks to the smoothness and serenity of our lives. For I must devise fresh obstructions if I am to go on desiring, and if I am to magnify my desire to the dimensions of a conscious and intense passion that shall be infinitely thrilling. And suffering alone can make me aware of passion; and that is why I like to suffer and to cause to suffer. When Tristan carries off Iseult to the forest, where there is nothing any longer to obstruct their union, the

<sup>1</sup> The title of a novel by Max Brod, *Die Frau nach der man sich sehnt*—the woman of our desire, of our nostalgia—supplies the best definition of Iseult. Passionate love wants 'the *far-away* princess' whereas Christian love wants 'our *neighbour*'.



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daemon of passion sets down a drawn sword between their two bodies. Let us descend a few centuries, stepping down at the same time the whole gamut that stretches from the age of religious heroism to the drab confusion in which men and women of our own profane era are struggling: instead of the knight's sword, it is the sly dream of the husband that comes between him and the wife he can only continue to desire by imagining she is his mistress.<sup>1</sup> In countless nauseating novels there is now depicted the kind of husband who fears the flatness and same old jog-trot of married life in which his wife loses her 'allure' because no obstructions come between them. Such husbands are the pathetic victims of a myth the mystical promise of which long ago faded out. In the eyes of Tristan Iseult was nothing but the symbol of luminous Desire: his other world was the divinizing death that was to release him from terrestrial ties. But for a man whom the myth now haunts without disclosing its secret, there is no other world beyond passion except another passion, which he must pursue in another turmoil of appearances each time more fleeting. Originally it was of the essence of mystic passion to be *without end*, and that is how this passion brought release from the urgency of carnal desire. But whereas infinity in the eyes of Tristan was an eternity from which there could be no return and in which his lacerated spirit would at last dissolve, men and women to-day can look to nothing but the everlasting return of an ardour constantly being thwarted.

Formerly victims of the myth could not throw off its spell except by escaping out of the finite world. To-day a passion calling itself 'irresistible' (as an alibi for the discharge of responsibility) cannot even discover how to be *faithful*, since its end is no longer transcendence. One after the other, it exhausts illusions it has found all too easy to

<sup>1</sup> The recipe was made available as early as Balzac's *Physiologie du mariage* (1828).

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grasp. Instead of leading to death, it is broken off by unfaithfulness. How evident the degradation of a Tristan who has *several* Iseults! But it is not he who should be blamed; for he is the victim of a social organization in which the obstructions have been cheapened. They break down too soon, before the undertaking has been completed. A soul that sets out to rise in opposition to and above the world has incessantly to begin its ascent afresh. And thereupon a modern Tristan lets himself turn into the antithetical Don Juan type—the man of successive love affairs. The categories break down, and the experience itself ceases to be outstanding. Alone the mythical Don Juan could evade this consummation. But he knew no Iseult, no unattainable passion, neither past nor future, nor sensual anguish. He lived always in the present, having no time to love, to wait, or to remember; and nothing that he desired could resist him, because he *loved* not what did resist.

It is evident in the light of a knowledge of the original myth that the popular novels and films of the present day are the sign of a decay of the individual person; the sign of a sort of sickness of being. Nearly all the complications to which plots resort do not amount to more than a monotonous arrangement of the contrivances of an enfeebled passion in quest of *secret* obstructions. Passion now only wants somehow to keep going. For instance, there is the psychology of jealousy, a jealousy that has been wished for and that is provoked and surreptitiously encouraged—and not only in ‘the other’! A man or woman wants the beloved to be unfaithful in order that he or she may once again go forth in pursuit and once again ‘experience’ love for its own sake. Rapture is now no more than a sensation, and it leads nowhere. Married people are constantly being thrown back into a realm of comparison, which is the realm of jealousy. Extruding from his or her own self and also from the present as it is given, unable to take the other as he or she is, because that would mean being first of all content

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with oneself, a man or woman now sees on every side nothing but things to be coveted, qualities that he or she feels the want of, and grounds for comparison that invariably turn against the comparer. It hurts a husband to find that other women seem beautiful in a way his wife is not, even when everybody else insists that hers is the greater beauty. For he does not understand either how to possess or how to enjoy what reality has given him. He has lost the one essential—a sense of constancy. For to be faithful is to have decided to accept another being for his or her own sake, in his or her own limitations and reality, choosing this being not as an excuse for excited elevation or as an 'object of contemplation', but as having a matchless and independent life which requires *active* love.

It has got to be admitted that *passion wrecks the very notion of marriage at a time when there is being attempted the feat of trying to ground marriage in values elaborated by the morals of passion*. Of course it would be going too far to suggest that a majority of people to-day are a prey to Tristan's frenzy. Few are capable of the thirst that would cause them to drink the love-potion, and still fewer are being elected to succumb to the archetypal anguish. But they are all, or nearly all, dreaming about it, or else they have dreamed. And however worn and faded the mark of the original myth, it still hugs the secret of the anxiety that is nowadays disturbing married couples. The contemporary mind recoils from nothing so much as from the notion of a limitation deliberately accepted; and nothing pleases this mind more than the mirage of infinite transcendence which a recollection of the myth will produce. I have tried simply to expound the nature of the situation; but I realize that this section may not be very well received. We are too fond of our illusions to suffer gladly any attempt even to name them.

## FROM LAWLESSNESS TO EUGENICS

### IV

#### FROM LAWLESSNESS TO EUGENICS

Nevertheless, modern marriage, which may be said by antiphrasis to have been built on the ruins of the myth, amounts to a permanent state of lawlessness, and this must obviously involve perils such as no social organization can tolerate. I say nothing of the spiritual peril to which the morals of escape engendered by the myth must expose the 'person'. The social peril is enough to account for the number of attempts that were made between one European war and another 'to re-establish' marriage.

There were the respectable efforts of the Churches to define the institution afresh, together with the moral duties which it implies.<sup>1</sup> Humanists restated the arguments of Goethe and Engels in favour of marriage. According to the former, marriage is the greatest achievement of European culture and the solid foundation of any private life; according to the latter, monogamic unions provide the most sensible relation between the sexes in a society that has been emancipated from the restraints of money and class. Others sought to found a science of conjugal relations. Jung analysed the 'psychological conflict' and the 'neuroses' that lie, in his opinion, at the root of the evil; he hinted that medical psychology could put everything straight. Van de Velde and Hirschfeld suggested that the best course would be to spread a more accurate knowledge of sex.

So many inquiries and so many panaceas indicate how serious the question is, but they have not produced any adequate means of settling it. Curiously enough, too, every

<sup>1</sup> The encyclical *Casti connubii* replied to the decisions of the Anglican Lambeth Conference. The oecumenical meetings at Stockholm and Oxford of representatives of all the non-Roman Churches also touched on the problem.

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one of these learned authors devotes a few lines to extolling passion, or at least to seeming to countenance it. There are obvious reasons for hesitating to offend readers in their most intimate and assured convictions. To do so would seem 'puritanical'. Some of these writers, however, go further, indulging in the paradox that loving passion may crown a union that has been perfectly achieved (according to their recipe). Nobody, so far as I know, has dared to say that love, *as understood nowadays*, is the flat negation of the marriage to which it is claimed that this love can serve as support. The reason is that nobody seems to know exactly what passionate love may be, and neither where it comes from nor whither it may lead. There is indeed a feeling that something is wrong, but writers also fear (quite correctly) that if they attacked passion they would pass for Philistines. So the fundamental problem is passed over with a simulated lightness. 'We must get ourselves read, and win confidence. There is no going against the tide of a whole epoch. Passion has always existed, it therefore always will exist; and we are no Don Quixotes.' No doubt! And yet something *must* be done. Hence the one question confronting the historian and sociologist is: *What mechanism* will be released in order to put matters right—what mechanism or what collective reflex?

Two large-scale experiments furnish one kind of answer, and perhaps point to the solution to which we shall all be brought.

Revolutionary Russia was the scene of a youthful 'outburst' of sex which it is tempting to regard as unprecedented in European annals.<sup>1</sup> As for marriage, theoretically it was swept away during the early stages of the Soviets. Nihilist or romantic intellectuals had inspired the young

<sup>1</sup> Actually, similar happenings occurred among the youth in so-called bourgeois countries. But in Russia principles of 'emancipation' were advertised; elsewhere the young were content to put these principles into practice.

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Bolshevist leaders with a doctrine that found expression in unmarried co-habitation, abortion, and the desertion of babies—in short, in whatever was imagined to defy reactionary prejudices mistakenly thought to have been fostered by bourgeois capitalism. Lenin, in a famous letter to a woman Bolshevik named Zetkin, describes this collapse of morals, and protests with all the vigour of a 'professional' revolutionary—and hence of a Puritan—against the sexual lawlessness which—using the words in their contemptuous Marxian sense—he termed 'petit bourgeois'. Twenty years later, a 'restoration of morals' had been achieved, not owing to any sudden revival of virtue nor thanks to the efforts of some philanthropic society, but as a result of the deliberate action of a dictatorship fully alive to the conditions requisite for its survival. Stalin's immediate aim was to rebuild the framework of his nation. For in the absence of a framework economic life was in danger of collapse, and 'national defence' could not be organized without constant appeal to the passion of the early revolutionaries, and it was precisely this passion that Stalin had determined to get rid of. To lay down new social foundations, and especially that most stable and most stabilizing of units: the family, became therefore a vital necessity. The nature of the mechanism of productivist dictatorship compelled the so-called Socialist State to decree a series of laws against divorce—which was made more burdensome—and against abortion and the deserting of babies born out of wedlock. The sudden severity of these laws, the psychological shock which they inflicted, propaganda, and measures enabling the police to keep a watch on private life, transformed the moral atmosphere of Russia round about the year 1936.<sup>1</sup> Marriage was instituted again on strictly utilitarian, collectivist, and eugenic principles; and there was promoted a spirit in which individual problems

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hélène Iswolsky, *Femmes soviétiques* (Paris, 1937).

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tended to lose all their dignity, legitimacy, and lawless virulence.<sup>1</sup>

In post-war Germany the level of lawlessness to which sex sank was possibly quite as low as that reached in Russia before Stalin. The gradual decay of social restraints was not accompanied by any outward violence, but on that very account the marriage morals of the young were all the more seriously undermined. At the same time the decline of the passion myth in the fatherland of Romanticism involved far more complicated consequences than in France, and they seemed of the greatest variety. The morbid shamelessness of the German post-war years, the *neue Sachlichkeit* promoted by advanced writers and artists, the homosexuality so common in the secret societies that were a prelude to Hitlerism, the sadistic outbursts in the Baltic *Freikorps*, the so-called 'political' crimes committed by leagues of youth, certain forms of nudism, the 'trial betrothals' that became customary among students, the serious manner in which passionate quarrels involving 'threes' or 'fours' were treated—on the model of Friedrich Schlegel's *Lucinde*—all these were so many signs of the sex stampede that followed the weakening of matrimonial restraints and the decline of the myth of fatal love. Already the elements of despair and of private surrender to impulse, which are implicit in any pseudo-legitimization of a strictly individual 'happiness', were rising to the surface.

But Hitler's dictatorship, for the very reason that it claimed to operate for racial and military ends, was bound to address itself at the very outset to repairing this breakdown in the nation's morals. To begin with, the anti-social

<sup>1</sup> When dealing with the U.S.S.R. the words 'family', 'eugenics', and 'abolition of passion' should all be put in inverted commas. The headlong drop in the population has compelled Stalin to encourage births. But who can be sure that his plans are being carried out? And his motives, I repeat, are not in the least 'moral'; rather are they military.

## FROM LAWLESSNESS TO EUGENICS

ideal of 'happiness' and that of 'living dangerously' were countered by the promotion of a collective ideal. 'Gemeinnütz geht vor Eigennütz!' The general interest comes before that of individuals! Next, by means of every spectacular, didactic, and even religious instrument that it could devise, Hitlerism effected the extraordinary *transference*<sup>1</sup> which resulted in making the one legitimate and possible object of passion the concept of a Nation symbolized in its Führer. First, woman was bereft of her romantic halo and relegated to the position of wife, her only function being to bear and to bring up children till at the age of four or five they could be handed over to the Party. Next, certain steps in eugenics were taken. A 'school of future brides' was opened in order to supply wives to the S.S. (*Schutz-Staffeln*), who are a carefully selected body of men supposed to incarnate the racial ideal. Entrance to this school was confined to girls of fair complexion, of Aryan blood, and at least 5 ft. 6 in. in height. Hence, in Germany, a man's 'type of woman' has been fixed for him, not by the recollections of his unconscious nor by exotic fashions, but by the scientific section of the Ministry of Propaganda. In 1938 similar schools were set up for all German women, and attendance at these schools may well have become compulsory. The ultimate aim is obvious. A time will come when only eugenic marriages are legal, and they will be allowed to take place entirely according to social, racial, and physiological data; they will not be affected in any way by individual 'taste'. When that happens scientific marriage will have fulfilled the dream of Lysurgus: it will have become a stage in military training.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Briefly described in Book V, *supra*.

<sup>2</sup> Since the above was written, events have speeded up. The German Law of 6 July 1938 decrees that marriages must henceforth take place 'in the name of the State'. Draconian steps against bachelors have been taken in Italy: towns of more than 5,000 inhabitants must expel all those over the age of twenty-five.



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Regarding the future, three possibilities may be considered.

In the first place, it may be that twenty or a hundred years hence the external conditions indispensable to a reconstruction of the myth may once again exist. Passion, in being officially eliminated, disqualified, and labelled as mere social weakness (or sabotage), would be driven underground. This might cause it to devise a new symbolical language, esoteric and ostensibly harmless, and to recover the sacred and military features it now lacks, so that it could once again direct the course of human life. Its fatal progress would again be able *to simulate* epic and political adventure. And passionate experience would then start at a tension incalculably greater than it did in the twelfth century.

But the war, or series of wars, on which the world has now embarked, may prevent this from happening; for war is a release of passion on the collective and national plane.

Yet, in the third place, it may be, notwithstanding the war, that enforced eugenics will be a *success* there where all moral doctrines had failed, and that this will result in the effective disappearance of any 'spiritual'—and hence artificial—need of passion. The disappearance would mean that the tremendous impulse originated by courtly love eight hundred years ago had at last been arrested. The Europe of passion would be no more. A new and unforeseeable Europe would be taking its rise in the laboratory.

*Book Seven*

*Active Love, or Keeping Faith*



## I

### WE MUST TAKE OUR STAND

How futile the intellectual attitude that would describe itself as being against passion! There is no arguing with passion, no reasoning with it; for it does not wish to have reason on its side. To succumb to passion is precisely to rest content with being in the wrong according to the world—in the great, irrevocable wrong of preferring death over life. To attack passionate love successfully would require a spiritual violence more lethal than this love itself. For first and last, at the beginning and the end of passion, there is no 'delusion' about man or about God—and *a fortiori* no moral delusion—but a crucial decision: a man wishes to be his own god.<sup>1</sup> Passion brands the heart the moment the cold-blooded serpent—the complete cynic—has whispered his eternally unfulfilled promise: *Eritis sicut dei!* How artless and innocent the moralist who thought to turn a man from taking this fatal, divinizing road by 'demonstrating' to him that it leads to ruin! By pleading every earthly reason, and offering him the support of all the arts of *living*, when earth is what this man contemns, and life is the fault he regards as needing to be redeemed! Such a man's passion can be overcome only by killing him before he can kill himself, and in some other way than he wishes to die.

As for rendering innocuous the area of culture into which passion has dug its roots, that is a task that the State will probably see to as part of its hygienic policy. But for me,

<sup>1</sup> I confine myself to the limiting case of Tristan. There are cases of passion in Christian marriage, and of married states in passion.

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here and now, the problem offers no possibility of evasion by relying upon the time to come. If indeed we must assume that nobody can be aware of the nature of his own desires nor plumb the depths of his own most secret inclinations, at least each may survey what he has done and face the consequences of the decisions he has ventured. All I now intend to offer, then, is a statement of the stand I personally have taken—of the choice that I am conscious of having made in my own life. It is no cut-and-dried solution. Even were such a solution possible, it could avail only for me alone: nobody ever decides except for himself. But having written a whole book about passion, I must not shirk *completing* the description with an account of this feature of the subject, thanks to which the book will be lifted, not into some abstract sphere where passion cannot subsist, but into the concrete world where choice determines our lives.

## II

### A CRITIQUE OF MARRIAGE

If no argument that I can see is valid against true passion, so likewise it seems to me that reason is equally powerless to justify marriage; I feel indeed that every one of the extremely varied objections that the finest minds have ever urged against it is still *fully* valid. At all times the Philistine's reasons have betrayed a bad conscience beside the romantic's ironies; but in the face of plain veracity these reasons are utterly put to rout. The 'happy home' is no more than a stock phrase in the vocabulary of a certain political speechifying, either middle-class or aiming to edify. Tolstoy describes home as 'hell'. I think he deserves the greater credence. Inasmuch as when taken one by one most human beings of both sexes are rogues, why should

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they turn into angels the moment they are paired? Push open the first door that offers. The quiet which a wife is supposed to ensure the noble breadwinner, on his returning home at night exhausted and anxious to relax in domestic peace, ranges nine times out of ten from a restless running to and fro of little attentions to an uncontrolled bawling. Were some of the 'peaceful' conversation that enlivens 'the domestic hearth' of a business-man or mechanic selected at haphazard and made into a gramophone record, censorship would for once have established a *raison d'être*!

Yes, the romantics are right; and so are the realists; and so are the scholars who declare in the name of their vocation that one must choose between writing books and producing children. *Aut liberi aut libri*, as Nietzsche put it. And Kierkegaard is right over them all, because, first, he extolled passion as being the highest value in the 'aesthetic stage' of life; then rose above passion by extolling marriage as being the highest value in the 'ethical stage' (the 'fullness of time'); and finally condemned marriage as the highest obstruction in the 'religious stage', since marriage fetters us to time where faith requires eternity. What objections can be brought against this man that he himself has not already more accurately stated? Kierkegaard is able to praise both the Philistine and the romantic, and to put them both so thoroughly in the right as to make them ashamed of ever having doubted themselves; but in the end he not only crushes the Philistine who is content to marry a brewer's widow or the young lunatic who is in love with a king's daughter, but also the pious man who has imagined that religion ought to be a happy union—a marriage with his own virtue. For the sinner's love of God is 'essentially unhappy', and this Christian passion is the only truth, a truth from which every one of our human 'duties' (including that of being happy) does but turn us aside. Kierkegaard first denounces the Protestant ministers who objected to celibacy; then Luther and Calvin who were both

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married; then the Fathers who praised marriage; and finally Saint Paul who permitted marriage. Christ alone lived like a Christian! How refute this extremist? Unbelievers are referred to the arguments of the romantics, which are valid against their secular moralizing; and believers to the arguments of Saint Paul, which are valid against their humanism. What does the Apostle say?

‘It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband; and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for incontinency. But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment. For it is better to marry than to burn. But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. They that use the world be as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.’

And here comes the finishing stroke:

‘He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife.’

Everything to be urged against marriage is true, and therefore should be urged against it, either from the romantic standpoint—if we believe in Iseult—or from the standpoint of the whole-hearted scholar—if we believe in our work—or from the purely spiritual standpoint—if we believe. Hence it is impossible to uphold marriage till we have passed beyond the first two criticisms, and are on the way to the third—that is, till we are keeping steadily before us the inhuman requirement of perfection as an eternal

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question, as a goad that can prevent us from faltering under the assault of human objections.

If I fail to consider the state which is not only beyond marriage but also beyond every human order, the state called the Kingdom of God, my vision and hope are *restricted* to a relative perfection—the poise in imperfection that is marriage. Thereupon, if I cannot reach this poise, all I may do is to rebel against my creature state; yet if I reach this poise too readily, I become the Philistine pilloried by the romantics, or the moral being caught in the toils of society, and I am thereupon denied any understanding of those ‘cruel’ truths of the spirit spoken of by Nietzsche.

But if I am convinced that the Apostle is right and agree with him, I adopt an open mind towards the imperfect poise of marriage and—happily or unhappily—live in wait of perfection. I realize that it is a *wild* attempt I am making (although at the same time an altogether natural one) to live perfectly in imperfection. But I also realize that this attempt must possess an unshakable truth if it incessantly bears witness to what transcends every kind of consequence, however excellent.

### III

## MARRIAGE AS A DECISION

Once we ask ourselves what is involved in choosing a man or a woman *for the rest of one's life*, we see that to choose is to wager. Both in the lower and the middle classes the wise-*acres* urge young men ‘to think it over’ before taking the decisive step. They thus foster the delusion that the choice of a wife or husband may be governed by a certain number of accurately weighable pros and cons. This is a crude delusion on the part of common sense. You may try as hard as you like to put all the probabilities at the outset in your own favour—and I am assuming you have the time to spare



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for such nice calculations—but you will never be able to foresee how you are going to develop, still less how the wife or husband you choose is going to, and still less again how the two of you together are going to. The factors involved are too diverse. Suppose you could 'weigh them as they are now (assuming them to be finite in number) and you were so deeply versed in human affairs as to know the values of every one of them and their order, you would still be unable to foresee how a union entered upon with all the *facts* duly weighed was going to shape. Nature is said to have required hundreds of thousands of years for the selection of those species which now seem to us adapted to their surroundings. And yet we have the presumption to suppose that all of a sudden in the course of a single life we may solve the problem of the adaptation to one another of two highly organized physical and moral beings! For this is what all unsatisfactory married persons suppose whenever they grow convinced that a second or third trial is going to yield a closer approximation to 'happiness', notwithstanding that everything goes to show that even a hundred thousand trials would not provide the first inchoate and altogether empirical data upon which to build a science of 'happy marriage'. It needs to be recognized frankly that the problem with which we are confronted by the practical necessity of marriage becomes the more hopelessly insoluble the more we strive 'to solve' it in a rational way.

True, I have not stated the case quite fairly; for as a rule everything happens as if the happiness of a married pair actually did depend on a finite number of factors—character, beauty, fortune, social position, and so on. But as soon as individual demands<sup>1</sup> are put forward, these external data

<sup>1</sup> The further we get away from the *species* and the nearer we come to the *person*, the more choice becomes particular. And to this endowment of the beloved with a particular personality there may correspond an increasingly specific quality of instinctive behaviour. Such is Dr. Maranon's argument in favour of monogamy.

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lose importance, and it is imponderables that determine our decision. Thereupon it is common sense that turns out to have argued unfairly in recommending that our choice should result from a mature and reasonable submission of the data to impersonal criteria.

But after all the logical fallacy is negligible; what matters is the moral fallacy which the logical implies. When a young engaged couple are encouraged to calculate the probabilities in favour of their happiness, they are being distracted from the truly moral problem. The attempt to minimize or to conceal the fact that when considered objectively a choice of this kind is a wager fosters the belief that everything depends on wisdom or on a set of rules, when actually it depends on a *decision*. And yet, inasmuch as no set of rules can be anything but imperfect and provisional, if we are to be guided by rules we also need some kind of guarantee. But the only possible guarantee would be one supplied by the strength of the decision whereby we commit ourselves during the rest of our lives 'for better, for worse'. And it is precisely to the extent that we persuade ourselves that the matter is above all one of calculation and of weighing up that the decision in itself is made to seem secondary or superfluous. I therefore feel that it would be more appropriate both to the essential nature of marriage and to the facts for young people to be taught that their choice must always be arbitrary, and that they are committing themselves to bear the consequences of this, whether the consequences turn out happy or unhappy. I do not seek to defend acting on 'rash impulse'; to the extent that probabilities can be weighed, it would be stupid not to weigh them. But I insist that the guarantee of a union in appearance sensible never lies in this appearance. It must lie in that irrational event, a decision that we venture upon in spite of everything and that lays the foundation of a new life in being a consent to take new chances.

Let me forestall any misunderstanding. 'Irrational' in

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no way means 'sentimental'. To choose a woman for wife is not to say to Miss So-and-So: 'You are the ideal of my dreams, you more than gratify all my desires, you are the Iscult altogether lovely and desirable—and endowed with a suitable dowry—of whom I want to be the Tristan.' For this would be deceit, and nothing enduring can be founded on deceit. Nobody in the world can gratify me; no sooner were I gratified than I would change! To choose a woman for wife is to say to Miss So-and-So: 'I want to live with you just as you are.' For this really means: 'It is you I choose *to share* my life with me, and that is the only *evidence* there can be that I love you.' If anybody says, 'Is that all?'—and this is no doubt what many young people will say, having been led by virtue of the myth to expect goodness knows what divine transports—he must have had little experience of solitariness and dread, little experience indeed of solitary dread.

Alone a decision of this kind, irrational but not sentimental, sober but in no way cynical, can serve as the basis for a real fidelity; and I do not say: 'A fidelity that will prove a recipe for "happiness" '; I only say: 'A feasible fidelity, because it is not being wrecked at birth by some necessarily inaccurate calculation.'

## IV

### ON KEEPING TROTH

The morals of marriage are distorted by the way the plighting of a troth is made into a problem when no problem can arise till *after* the pledge has been exchanged with the understanding that it is absolutely binding. The problematical element in marriage belongs not to *cur* but to *quomodo*, to the 'how' and not the 'why'. Kierkegaard says: 'Morality does not set out from an ignorance which needs

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to be changed into knowledge, but from a knowledge that requires to be put into practice.' It is not the nature of the pledge exchanged in marriage that is problematical, but the consequences involved by the pledge. For a troth does not have to give its reasons, or then it is not a troth, any more than anything else potentially noble and great would be; any more than passion!

The moralists, and also some of the sociologists, have tried to maintain that monogamy is natural, and, moreover, beneficial. That is a theme open to interminable discussion. And it will become highly pertinent the day men behave rationally and in obedience to their own best interests, the day they no longer have passions, no longer cherish error for itself, and no longer deserve the disturbing epithet of 'human' in the sense of 'able to act'. Meanwhile, I fancy that men and women as they are now must look upon fidelity as the least natural of virtues, the one most inimical to 'Happiness'. In their eyes and as they put it, faithful marriage can only exist as the result of an 'inhuman' effort. Their fundamental claim, their religion of Life, is diametrically opposed to it. They think fidelity is a discipline dictated (to our spontaneous impulses and desires) by an absurd and cruel prejudice, or else is a prudent abstinence. Or else again they regard it as the consequence of an inability to live to the full, of a spiritless liking for what is comfortable and conventional, of a lack of imagination, of a contemptible timidity, or of a sordid calculation. The habit of people to-day, their acquired nature, is to make the most of every situation for its own sake, without any longer referring their conduct to what 'judges' and 'measures' the enjoyment which they thereby obtain. Actually, an acquired respect for the social order is the only thing that still upholds the notion of fidelity. But this is not treated as a serious obstruction, and is circumvented in a hundred ways. Listen to the excuses of a husband who deceives his wife. He may say: 'It's of no importance, it doesn't alter our

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relations, it's merely a passing affair, a lapse without a sequel'; or else: 'It's absolutely vital for me, and tremendously more important than all your petty morals and assurances of middle-class happiness!' Between a cynical attitude and tragic romanticism there is no real contradiction, as I showed earlier.<sup>1</sup> In each case it is a matter of *escaping* from some actual pledge because a pledge is thought to be a hateful limitation.

Forgoing any rationalist or hedonist form of apology, I propose to speak only of a truth that is observed *by virtue of the absurd*—that is to say, simply because it has been pledged—and by virtue of being an absolute which will uphold husband and wife as persons. Fidelity, it must be admitted, stands emphatically athwart the stream of values nowadays admired by nearly every one. Fidelity is extremely *unconventional*. It contradicts the general belief in the revelatory value of both spontaneity and manifold experiences. It denies that in order to remain lovable a beloved must display the greatest possible *number* of qualities. It denies that its own goal is happiness. It offensively asserts first, that its aim is obedience, and secondly, that it is the expression of a wish to be constructive. For fidelity is not in the least a sort of conservatism, but rather a construction. An 'absurdity' quite as much as passion, it is to be distinguished from passion by its persistent refusal to submit to its own dream, by its persistent need of acting in behalf of the beloved, by its being persistently in contact with a reality which it seeks to control, not to flee.

I maintain that fidelity thus understood is the best means we have of becoming persons. The person is manifested in the making. What is person within each of us is an entity built up like a work of art—built up thanks to constructiveness and in the same conditions as we construct things, its first condition being a fidelity to something that before was

<sup>1</sup> *Gauloiserie* as much as passion was an escape from reality, a way of idealizing it. Cf. p. 183, *supra*.

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not, but now is in process of being created. Person, constructiveness, fidelity—the three terms are neither separable nor separately intelligible. All three presuppose that a stand has been taken, and that we have adopted what is fundamentally the attitude of creators. Hence in the humblest lives the plighting of a troth introduces the opportunity of constructiveness and of rising to be a person—on condition, of course, that the pledge has not been for ‘reasons’ in the giving of which there is a reservation allowing those reasons to be repudiated some day when they have ceased to appear ‘reasonable’! The pledge exchanged in marriage is the very type of a *serious* act, because it is a pledge given once and for all. The irrevocable alone is serious! Every life, even the most disinherited, has some immediate potentiality of dignity, and it is in an ‘absurd’ fidelity that this dignity may be attained—in a readiness to say ‘No’ to dazzling passion when there is every earthly reason for saying ‘Yes’—to say ‘No’ by virtue of the absurd, by virtue of an old promise, of human unreason, of a reason of faith, of a pledge given to God and underwritten by God. And perhaps later on, afterwards, a man or woman may find that the folly of the accepted sacrifice was the greatest wisdom; and that the happiness he or she has forgone is being restored, even as Isaac was restored to Abraham. But this can only happen if he or she has not expected it. And it may also be that nothing rewards our loss: we are among dimensions where ordinary worldly measures no longer avail. But are we still capable of imagining a dignity and greatness in no way romantic and the opposite of excited ardour? The fidelity of which I am speaking is foolish, and yet our folly is then of the most sober and everyday kind. *A sober folly that rather closely simulates behaving sensibly*; that is neither heroic nor challenging, but a patient and fond application of the self. It is the complete opposite of anything literary or lyrical, as such epithets are used to-day.

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However, everything has still not been made plain. Tristan also was faithful. And so is every true passion. (Not to mention the successive fidelity we display in each of our 'affairs' nor that of all the Tristans who are really Don Juans in slow time.) It remains accordingly to show where the difference lies, and to ascertain why a faithful husband should not simply be the man who recognizes Iseult in his wife.

When the lover in the Manichæan legend has undergone the great ordeals of initiation, he is met, you remember, by a 'dazzling maiden' who welcomes him with the words: 'I am thyself!' So with fidelity in the myth, and Tristan's. Fidelity is then a mystic narcissism—usually unconscious of course, and imagining itself to be true love for *the other*. In analysing the courtly legends, however, we saw that Tristan is not in love with Iseult, but with love itself, and beyond love he is really in love with death—that is, with the only possible release there can be for a self guilty and enslaved. Tristan is true neither to a pledge nor to a symbolical being named Iseult. She is but a lovely pretext, and all the time he is being true to his most profound and secret passion. The myth seizes on 'the death instinct' inseparable from any form of created life, and transfigures it by bestowing upon it an essentially spiritual goal. To destroy oneself, to despise happiness, is thereupon a way of salvation and of acceding to a higher life, to 'the highest bliss of being' sung of by the expiring Iseult. It is a fidelity destructive of life, but that also destroys the fault in divinizing the now 'innocent' *self*!

Of this original mystical form, 'passionate troth' has by now preserved no more than the illusion of giving access to a more ardent life. But the power of the illusion betrays that the original religion still obscurely survives—a religion that was prior to our modern 'instinct' and that secretes the intimate riddle of passion at depths which our psychologists are unable to plumb.

## ON KEEPING TROTH

'Our vows were not exchanged for this world', Novalis wrote, having in mind his lost love. The words are at once a moving expression of courtly fealty and an *irrevocable* negation of life. But the troth of marriage is, on the contrary, a pledge given unreservedly for *this* world. Inspired by an unreason 'mystical' (if you like) and, if not hostile, at least indifferent to happiness and the vital instinct, fidelity in marriage requires a re-entry into the real world, whereas courtesy meant only an escape from it. In marriage the loving husband or wife vows fidelity first of all to *the other*, not to his or her self. And whereas Tristan showed himself constant in a steadfast refusal, in a desire to exclude and deny creation in its diversity and to prevent the world from encroaching upon spirit, the fidelity of the married couple is acceptance of one's fellow-creature, a willingness to take the other as he or she is in his or her intimate particularity. Let me insist that fidelity in marriage cannot be merely that negative attitude so frequently suggested; it must be active. To be content not to deceive one's wife or husband would be an indication of indigence, not one of love. Fidelity demands far more: it wants the good of the beloved, and when it acts in behalf of that good it is creating in its own presence the neighbour. And it is by this round-about way through the other that the self rises into being a person—beyond its own happiness. Thus as persons a married couple are a mutual creation, and to become persons is the double achievement of 'active love'. What denies both the individual and his natural egotism is what constructs a person. At this point faithfulness in marriage is discovered to be the law of a new life, though not of natural life (that would be polygamy) and not of life for the sake of death (that was Tristan's passion).

Tristan's faithful love destroyed both his happiness and his life in order to bear witness in behalf of Night—that is, in behalf of the glorified self. Faithful love in Christian marriage bears witness that the will of God, even when



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fatal to our happiness, is salutary. The love of Tristan and Iseult was the anguish of being *two*; and its culmination was a headlong fall into the limitless bosom of Night, there where individual shapes, faces, and destinies all vanish: 'Iseult is no more, Tristan no more, and no name can any longer part us!' The other has to cease to be the other, and therefore, to cease to be altogether, in order that he or she shall cease to make me suffer and that there may be only 'I myself am the world!' But married love is the end of anguish, the acceptance of a limited being whom I love because he or she is a summons to creation, and that in order to witness to our alliance this being turns with me towards day.

A life linked with mine, for the rest of our lives—that is the miracle of marriage. Another life that wills my good because it is united with mine: and were this not for the rest of our lives, it would be a menace, such as is ever present in the exchanged pleasures of an 'affair'. But few people now seem to be able to distinguish between an obsession which is undergone and a destiny that we shoulder.

## V

## EROS RESCUED BY AGAPE

Thereupon charitable love, Christian love—which is Agape—appears at last and risen to its full height. It is the expression of being. And it is Eros, passionate love, pagan love, that spread through the European world the poison of an idealistic *askesis*—all that Nietzsche unjustly lays at the door of Christianity. And it is Eros, not Agape, that glorified our death instinct and sought 'to idealize' it. But Agape has got its own back by saving Eros. For Agape is incapable of destruction, and does not even wish to destroy what destroys.

## EROS RESCUED BY AGAPE

'I desire not the death of a sinner, but that he may live.'

The god Eros is the slave of death because he wishes to elevate life above our finite and limited creature state. Hence the same impulse that leads us *to adore* life thrusts us into its negation. There lies the profound woe and despair characterizing Eros, his inexpressible bondage; and in making this bondage evident Agape has delivered Eros from it. Agape is aware that our terrestrial and temporal life is unworthy of adoration and even of being killed, but that it can be accepted in obedience to the Eternal. For, after all, it is here below that our fate is being decided. It is on earth that we must love and obtain forgiveness. In the next world, we shall meet, not divinizing Night, but our Creator and Judge.

This prospect is one that natural man was unable to imagine. He was thus condemned to put his faith in Eros—that is, to trust in his most powerful desire and to expect release through this desire. Yet Eros could lead him but to death. But a man who believes the revelation of Agape suddenly beholds the circle broken: faith delivers him from natural religion. Now he *may* hope for something else; he is aware that there is some other release from sin. And thereupon Eros in turn has been relieved of his fatal office and delivered from his fate. *In ceasing to be a god, he ceases to be a demon.*<sup>1</sup> And he finds his proper place in the provisional economy of Creation and of what is human.

The Pagans could not do otherwise than make Eros into a god; Eros was the most powerful force within them, the most dangerous and the most mysterious, the most deeply bound up with the event of living. All pagan religions deify Desire. All seek to be upheld and saved by Desire, which is thus instantly transformed into the greatest enemy of life, the seduction of Nothingness. But once the Word was made flesh and had spoken to us in human language, we learned

<sup>1</sup> Sin, it has been remarked, is not Eros, but the sublimation of Eros.

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the tidings that it is not we who have to deliver ourselves, but *God Who loved man first* and came down to him Who will deliver us. Salvation is no longer something beyond, and ever a little more out of reach during the interminable ascent of Desire, the consumer of life; it is here below and is attainable through obedience to the Word.

Hence all that we now have to fear of desire is that it should turn us away from obedience. But desire relinquishes its absolute hold over us the moment we cease to deify it. This is attested by the display of fidelity in marriage. For the foundation of this fidelity is an initial refusal *on oaitb* 'to cultivate' the illusions of passion, to render them a secret worship, or to expect from them any mysterious intensification of life. I may also indicate how it is so by consideration of something well known. Christianity has asserted the complete equality of the sexes, and this as plainly as possible. Saint Paul says:

'The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband; and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife.'

Once she is man's equal, woman cannot be 'man's goal'.<sup>1</sup> Yet at the same time she is spared the bestial abasement that sooner or later must be the price of divinizing a creature. But her equality is not to be understood in the contemporary sense of giving rise to rights. It belongs to the mystery of love. It is but the sign and evidence of the victory of Agape over Eros. For a truly mutual love exacts and creates the equality of those loving one another. God showed His love for man by exacting that man should be holy even as God is holy. And a man gives evidence of his love for a woman by treating her as a completely human person, not as if she were the spirit of the legend—half-goddess, half-bacchante, a compound of dreams and sex.

But from these premisses let us proceed to the concrete

<sup>1</sup> As Novalis supposed, and in supposing effected a revival of courtly mysticism and of the old Celtic tradition.

## BROS RESCUED BY AGAPE

psychology of married equality. When a man is faithful to one woman, he looks on other women in quite another way, a way unknown to the world of Eros: other women turn into persons instead of being reflections or means. This 'spiritual exercise' develops new powers of judgement, self-possession, and respect.<sup>1</sup> The opposite in this of an erotic man, a steadfast man no longer strives to see a woman as merely an attractive or desirable body, as merely an unintended movement or a fascinating expression; he feels, as soon as tempted, the difficult and serious mystery of an independent, alien existence; he realizes that he has been desiring only an illusory or fleeting aspect of what is actually a complete life, and that perhaps this aspect has been but a projection of his own reverie. Thus temptation recedes disconcerted instead of *making* itself into an obsession; and fidelity is made secure by the clear-sightedness it induces. The sway of the myth is by so much weakened, and although this sway is unlikely ever to be entirely abolished without leaving traces in hearts drugged by images, hearts such as men harbour to-day, at least it loses its efficacy. The myth no longer determines a person.

In other words, it may be said that fidelity secures itself against unfaithfulness by becoming accustomed not to separate desire from love. For if desire travels swiftly and anywhere, love is slow and difficult; love actually does pledge one for the rest of one's life, and it exacts nothing less than this pledge in order to disclose its real nature. That is why a man who believes in marriage can no longer believe seriously in 'love at first sight', still less in the 'irresistible' nature of passion. 'Love at first sight' is no doubt a legend that was accredited by Don Juan, as the 'irresistible' nature

<sup>1</sup> 'Respect', as I use the word here, means that we recognize in a being the fullness of a person. A person, according to Kant's famous definition ['A person is the subject whose actions are imputable.'—Translator], is what cannot be used by man as an instrument or thing.

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of passion was earlier accredited by Tristan. Neither the excuse nor the alibi can deceive any one who does not wish to be deceived because he thinks deception will be to his advantage; they are tropes of a romantic rhetoric, and allowable in that form, but only becoming ridiculous if confused with psychological truth.

My analysis of the myth has made it plain why people *like to believe* in irresistibility, which is an alibi invoked by the guilty. 'I didn't do it, I wasn't there; it was an irresistible power that acted in the stead of my person.' That is the pious lie<sup>1</sup> of a minister of Eros. But what a lot of self-encouragement resides in the word 'irresistible'! As for 'love at first sight', it is supposed to excuse Don Juan's lapses. All literature invites us to accept it as the sign of a very strongly sensual nature. Don Juan, the man of loves at first sight who led a 'tempestuous' life, passes for a kind of superman or supermale. This is a myth with an indeterminate power, hovering over moral contingencies; but we may be confident that it is a product of the reveries of the impotent. Indeed, Don Juan's behaviour is typical enough of one kind of sexual weakness. It is in a state of general weariness, sexually localized, that the body is led to commit these sudden lapses, not unakin to the puns that obsess a weary mind. But when body and mind are normally vigorous the chances of love at first sight must be very slender. It would thus seem that monogamy, in making sexual relations normal, becomes the best assurance of pleasure—that is, of the entirely carnal eros, which is not in the least to be deified.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On the unmistakable connexion between passion and lying, I have insisted *supra*, pp. 56–60, and p. 161 *supra*.

<sup>2</sup> I must repeat, however, that arguments of this kind cannot serve as a foundation for the institution of marriage. It is simply a matter of observation that refutes the current fancies which we owe to the Tristan myth and its Donjuanesque negative. But such 'reasons' are altogether ineffective as regards any one who prefers the myth and wishes to believe in the revelations of passion.

## PARADOXES OF THE WESTERN ATTITUDE

It may be objected that marriage must then be simply 'the grave of love'. But it is of course the myth once again that suggests this, thanks to its obsession of obstructed love. It would be more accurate to echo Croce and to say that 'marriage is the grave of savage love',<sup>1</sup> and more often the grave of sentimentality. Savage and natural love is manifested in *rape*—the evidence of love among all savage tribes. But rape, like polygamy, is also an indication that men are not yet in a stage to apprehend the presence of an actual person in a woman. This is as much as to say that they do not know how to love. Rape and polygamy deprive a woman of her equality by reducing her to sex. Savage love empties human relations of personality. On the other hand, a man does not control himself owing to lack of 'passion' (meaning 'susceptibility'), but precisely because he loves and in virtue of his love will not inflict himself. He refuses to commit an act of violence which would be the denial and destruction of the person. He thus indicates that his dearest wish is for the other's good. His egotism goes round via the other. This, it will be granted, is a notable revolution.

And we may now pass beyond that altogether negative and privative statement of Croce's, and at last define marriage as *the institution in which passion is 'contained', not by morals, but by love.*

## VI

## PARADOXES OF THE WESTERN ATTITUDE

These few remarks on passion and marriage will have set forth the fundamental antagonism of Eros and Agape—that is to say, the antagonism of the two religions that are

<sup>1</sup> Benedetto Croce, *Etica e Politica*.

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struggling for the upper hand in the West. It seems to me that once we are aware of this antagonism, of its historical and psychological origins, and of the spiritual issues involved, we must feel the need of revising a number of our current opinions—in the sphere of morality first and foremost, but in the spheres of culture and philosophy as well. As a conclusion to this work, I need doubtless only state the *corrective principle* which my inquiry into passion may be said to establish.

In the eyes of Orientals, the outstanding characteristic of the European attitude is the importance it attaches to passionate forces. They regard this as a heritage of Christianity and as the explanation of our strenuousness. And it is true that the three terms, 'Christianity', 'passion', and 'strenuousness', correspond to the three predominant features of the European psyche, so that such opinions seem self-evident. Yet if the conclusions which I have drawn from my investigation of the courtly myth are accurate, this view of Christian Europe calls for considerable re-adjustment.

In the first place, it was not Christianity that caused passion to be cultivated; it was a heresy of Eastern origin. This heresy began by spreading in precisely those regions which Christianity had not yet fully evangelized and where pagan cults still flourished in secret. Passionate love is not Christian love, nor even what has been called 'a Christian by-product'. It is rather a by-product of Manichaeism. More accurately, it became a cult through a collaboration of the Manichaean religion with our most ancient religious beliefs and through the struggle that ensued between heresy and Christian orthodoxy. That is a first important correction. Next, it is imperative to point out that our well-known 'Western strenuousness' has two distinct sources. If the term is intended to refer to our war frenzy, I have shown that historically this frenzy is connected in the clearest possible manner with passion. Like passion, the

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taste for war follows on a view that life should be ardent, a view which disguises a wish for death. It is an inverted strenuousness, and self-destructive. But our strenuousness has another aspect and one not to be connected with passion for a moment. I mean, our mechanical genius, which is the reflection of a human attitude the exact opposite of passionate: a faith in the value of created things, of matter, and of the action of the mind upon the visible world. Neither passion nor the heretical faith out of which it sprang could have inspired the belief that the control of Nature should be the aim of our lives, inasmuch as originally this control was held to be a function of the Demiurge, and salvation was held to lie precisely in an escape away from his devilish rule.<sup>1</sup>

We may ask ourselves whether this most striking expression of the restlessness of the European mind has not resulted from a disposition peculiar to our Continent, or whether it is not due to some indirect influence of the Christian ambition defined by the Apostle as the deliverance of the creature from the bondage of corruption—an ambition that may be taken as tending to re-establish the Cosmos under the original rule from which sin has caused it to break away. In Europe the Christian ambition to change the souls and conduct of sinners has given rise to an ambition to transform the human environment (whence comes the myth of revolution) and also the natural environment (whence came the attention bestowed on mechanics). But supposing Christianity had been established in India or China two thousand years ago, would the results there be by now the same? The answer to this question is irrelevant here. It is enough to note that the Christiano-Western (or creative) components of European strenuousness have been inspired by a will exactly the opposite of that of passion.

<sup>1</sup>. 'The theory of the Ancients that work is unworthy of a free-man recurs in chivalry', Henri Pirenne remarks in his *Histoire de l'Europe*, p. 113. But for other reasons, needless to add!



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What is misleading, and what indeed has produced an inevitable misunderstanding about our contemporary restlessness, is that war and our mechanical genius have been in collusion. When at the French Revolution war became 'national', it at once needed the assistance of every creative force, and that of mechanical force in particular. It was then that the passion of war was made the principal motive power of mechanical research. This has been very obvious since 1915. The truly monstrous combination of the death-dealing and creative forces changed the nature both of war and of our mechanical genius. Mechanized war got rid of passion, and mechanics, in becoming lethal, were unfaithful to the ambitions with which they had originated. Europe is possibly going to succumb to the fate it has thus prepared for itself. But obviously it is not Christianity—as so many writers allege—that will be responsible for the disaster. The catastrophic spirit in Europe is not Christian.<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, it is Manichæan. That is what those who identify Christianity with Europe commonly overlook. Everything European is not Christian. If therefore Europe were to succumb to its evil genius, it would be through having for too long cultivated the para-Christian or anti-Christian religion of passion.

Should we infer that passion has been *the Eastern temptation held before Europe*? Inasmuch as passion did not spread in our history and culture earlier than the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—and then only thanks to a peremptory impulsion from heresy in Southern France—it turns out that our 'fatal' beliefs reached us out of the Near East and Persia, the regions in which unmistakably the heresy first sprang up. Yet the same beliefs did not have the same effects in the East? No doubt, but in the East they were not

<sup>1</sup> It will be said: What about the Apocalypse? But the disasters which the Book of Revelation heralds represent our *punishment* and not our deliverance. It is not death or disincarnation that offers salvation; but the act of grace performed by God.

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obstructed and attacked as they were among us. *Hence it has been our dramatic luck to have opposed passion with weapons foredoomed to foster it.* Such is the persistent temptation to which we owe our finest creations. But what gives rise to life gives rise also to death. Let merely an accent be displaced, and strenuousness changes its sign. We may at least declare that the religious attitude of Europeans and the institution most typical of their morals—marriage—are now at a point where it is possible to behold this displacement of accent upon which everything depends.

Unquestionably a Christianized European differs profoundly from an Oriental in that he has the capacity to delve into the particularity of created beings. There lies the real clue to our faithfulness. The wisdom of the East pursues understanding in the progressive abolition of diversity. We, on the other hand, seek the density of being in every distinct person, and have constantly explored it more deeply as thus manifested. 'The more we understand individual things, the more we understand God', Spinoza says. His attitude shows how I perceive Europe, and in doing so it also shows what are the ultimate conditions for fidelity, for the person, and for marriage—and for the rejecting of passion. It is an attitude which takes dissimilarity for granted, and hence also imperfection and a hold upon the concrete within its limitations. A Christian accepts the world as it is, not as he may dream it should be. His 'creative' activity accordingly takes the form of penetrating as deeply as possible the whole diversity of the created universe. That is how it happened that in the Renaissance man was called a microcosm.

Whatever destroys this essential will, or distracts from it, must compromise fidelity and furnish passion with new opportunities. It is thus *our* life and *our* death that are involved. Hence the present breakdown of marriage is the least misleading indication of a decadence of Europe. There are of course other indications, and in the most various

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spheres—the cult of multiplicity, the poetry of escape, the way nationalist passions encroach upon culture—whatever tends to wreck the person. But they are complex and collective happenings which often elude personal apprehension. The indication given by the breakdown of marriage can be brought home to us, and it warns us quite unmistakably. No other sign is more obvious or more frequently repeated; no other is so readily confirmed within ourselves.

## VII

### BEYOND TRAGEDY

In many respects this book appears to be the account of a gradual decay. It has insisted on the degradation of the myth, on the breakdown of marriage, on the disparagement of convention and of formal modes, on the extrusion of the passionate frenzy into spheres where it may be in course of encompassing the collapse of civilization. All that is fact, and all that holds out a threat to us. Indeed, it is the more perilous in proportion as we ignore or dispute it. Yet my gradual diagnosis of it has repeatedly yielded glimpses of how it might be overcome. For instance, once totalitarianism will have broken down, it is possible that if that does not at the same time make for the destruction of Europe we shall recover the significance of a fidelity that is secured by substantial institutions and is adequate to the person. Perhaps, the very excesses of passion will excite a reaction in the guise of new formal modes, and there will thus be set up a new classical age. After all, however, is not this anxious concern over the morrow now furrowing so many brows another of the temptations of passion? Our lives are not being shaped in any temporal future, but in decisions establishing our faithfulness which must always

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be taken in the present. Whatever may befall, hap or mishap, the fate of the world matters much less to us than does an understanding of our immediate duties. 'For the fashion of this world passeth away', but obedience is always *hic et nunc*, in that act performed by the Eternal thanks to which we grasp our hope.

My *ostensible* conclusion can be supplied out of two items worth pondering that have been adumbrated here and there. I have striven to unravel certain problems propounded in terms of history and psychology; but the entirely objective interpretations to which I have been led are not self-sufficient. They call for certain decisions. They introduce a fresh uncertainty which is not altogether as clear-cut as the passion-fidelity dilemma may suggest. Actually, no problem is ever *understood* till we have foreseen how to solve it and pass beyond it. And it is no good trying to pass beyond the passion-fidelity dilemma by simply denying one of its horns. I have already said, and I insist again, that to doom passion in theory can only be to try to suppress one pole of our creative tension. Actually, such a thing is not feasible. The Philistine who is ready 'to condemn' all passion *a priori* confesses thereby never to have experienced passion of any kind. He is not one who has passed beyond the point of conflict, but one who has not yet reached it. The only advance it can be hoped that he might make would be achieved through the breakdown of his confidence—that is through his being engulfed in some dramatically passionate experience.<sup>1</sup> But beyond a passion that has

<sup>1</sup> I sometimes feel, indeed I sometimes realize, that from the standpoint of the Christian faith there is doubtless nothing to be gained by a 'putting in order of manners' for non-Christians. On the contrary, that would be a way of protecting them from the authentic human despair which might bring them to believe. The care of a soul, not in the sense of middle-class moral hygienics, but in the Christian sense that makes the desired end that an unbeliever should come to believe, should make us wish that non-Christians might go right through to the far side of the 'happi-

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been experienced all the way to its fatal dead-end there are two roads out, and the two items worth pondering that I have mentioned may be each held to indicate one of them. '

The first may be introduced by reference to Kierkegaard. This Danish thinker became engaged to a Copenhagen girl named Regine Olsen. Then, before the date of the wedding had been settled, he broke off his engagement, and this step was the starting-point for all his thinking.<sup>1</sup> The private causes of the break still remain imperfectly known.<sup>2</sup> It was an unsharable and unutterable 'secret' that in Kierkegaard's view obstructed his entering into marriage, because this marriage was to have been happy according to the world. The indispensable *obstruction* to passion was on this occasion so thoroughly subjective, peculiar, and unamenable to comparison, that its gravity will not be suspected unless with the help of a reference to Kierkegaard's faith. According to him, the relations which man—finite and sinful—can have with his God—who is Eternal and Holy—are exclusively those of a love *fatally* unhappy. 'God creates everything *ex nihilo*', he says, and whomsoever God elects by His love, 'He begins by reducing to nothing'. From the standpoint of the world and of natural life, God thus ap-

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ness' of passion. But all efforts are being directed to keeping them on *this side* of it. So that the only concrete *far side* that they are able to wish for or imagine is the 'disorder of passion'. But it needs to be added that a man abandoned to his disorderliness experiences a despair for which the remedy may well seem to him to be a rule. And it is only by renunciation of a rule *as thus understood* that we can be led to faith.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Walter Lowrie, *Kierkegaard* (London and New York, 1938).—Translator.

<sup>2</sup> In spite of numerous and all too 'modern' explanations undertaken from the standpoint of physiology, of psychiatry, and in particular of psycho-analysis. None of these explanations seems to me in any way to take into account the *unique* nature of the case. They would apply quite as well to any invalid devoid of genius and not a Christian.

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pears as 'my mortal enemy'. Here we are being brought up against the extreme limit, the pure springs of passion; and in the same moment we are thrust into the heart of the Christian faith! For, behold! the man now dead to the world, killed by infinite love, has to go forward and to live in the world as if he had no more urgent and higher task. 'The knight of faith', when met with in the street, has nothing superhuman about him: 'he looks like a tax-collector', and behaves like any decent middle-class citizen. And yet 'he has renounced all things with an infinite resignation, and if he has recovered all things in the sequel, it is *by virtue of the absurd* [that is, by virtue of faith]. He is constantly leaping into the infinite, but faultlessly and with complete confidence so that he drops back into the finite, and nothing is noticeable about him but the finite.'<sup>1</sup>

Thus the extremity of passion—death in love—introduces a new life, where passion never ceases to be present, but is under the most jealous incognito; for it is now far more than regal, it is divine. On the analogy of faith, it may thereupon be understood how *passion*—whatever the plane in which it is manifested—attains its true future state and salvation thanks only to that *act* of obedience which is a life steadfast and true. To live 'like everybody else' and yet 'by virtue of the absurd' becomes an offensive piece of deceit in the eyes of any one who does not *believe* in the absurd; but it is far more than a fusion, and something infinitely more and other than a 'solution', for any one who does believe that God keeps faith, and that love never deceives the beloved.

No doubt Kierkegaard did not succeed in 'recovering' the finite world except in his *awareness* of its loss, a loss that was tremendously fruitful for his genius. He never recovered Regine, but he never stopped loving her or dedicating his books to her. And perhaps it is to the writing of these books that he was most truly faithful. We need not

<sup>1</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Frygt og Bæven* (Fear and Trembling).

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seek anywhere but in his unquestionably unique vocation for being a Solitary the explanation of his failure as a man. Others are endowed with some other vocation; they marry Regine, and passion lives again in their marriage, but then 'by virtue of the absurd'. And they are day by day astounded to find that they are so happy. Such things are too elementary and too complete for words to interpose their dilatoriness between the question which they raise and the answer returned in our living experience.

The other item to be pondered is perhaps not entirely unconnected with this. It may even be regarded as a particular aspect of the transition back to passion that Kierkegaard describes. At the summit of the spiritual ascent which Saint John of the Cross narrates in the most ardently passionate language, he knows that the soul attains to a state in which it is perfectly in the presence of the loving object of love. He calls this mystic marriage. The soul then treats its love with a kind of semi-divine *indifference*. It has got beyond doubt and beyond the point at which separateness seems to be like a rending; it wishes for nothing whatever that its love does not wish for; it is at one with this love in duality, and the duality is now simply a dialogue of grace and obedience. And the desire for the highest passion is thereupon being gratified in the very act of obeying, so that the soul is no longer being cauterized and branded; there is not even any awareness of love, only the happy moderation of active being.

Thus, on the analogy of faith, passion, born of a fatal desire for mystical union, may be regarded as open to being surpassed and fulfilled only thanks to the *meeting* with some *other*, and the admission of this other's alien life and ever distinct person, which, although distinct, holds the promise of unending alliance and begins a real dialogue. Then dread having been banished by response and nostalgia by presence, they both cease to summon a happiness in sensation, cease to suffer, and are reconciled to terrestrial day. It is

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then that marriage becomes possible. We are two in contentment.

A last time, however, I shall side with moderation. Married couples are not saints, and sin is not some error which we may renounce one of these days in order to adopt a more accurate truth. We are unendingly and incessantly in the thick of the struggle between nature and grace; unendingly and incessantly unhappy and then happy. But the horizon has not remained the same. A fidelity maintained in the Name of what does not change as we change will gradually disclose some of its mystery: *beyond tragedy another happiness waits*. A happiness resembling the old, but no longer belonging to the way of the world, for this new happiness transforms the world.













